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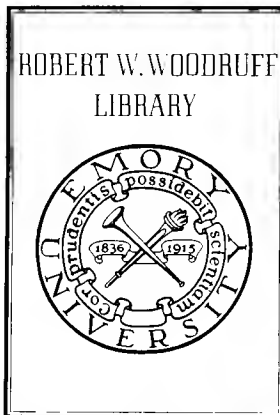
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OR,

THE DAYS OF MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS.

BOTHWELL;

OR,

THE DAYS OF MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS.

BY

JAMES GRANT, ESQ.,

AUTHOR OF "ROMANCE OF WAR," "PHILIP ROLLO," ETC.

NEW EDITION.

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BOTHWELL;

OR,

THE DAYS OF MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS.

CHAPTER I.

THE CASTLE OF BERGEN.

It was the autumn of a bleak day in the September of 1566. Enveloped in murky clouds, through which, at times, its red rays shot along the crested waves, the Norwegian sun was verging to the westward. From the frozen Baltic a cold wind swept down the Skager Rack, and, urged by the whole force of the Atlantic ocean, the sullen waves poured their foam upon the rocky bluffs and fissured crags that overhang the fiord of Christiana.

In those days, a vessel in the fiord proved an object of the greatest interest to the inhabitants of the hamlet; and it was with growing fears that the anxious housewives and weatherwise fishermen of Bergen, a little wooden town situated on the bay of Christiana, watched the exertions made by the crew of a small crayer or brigantine, of some eighty tons or so, that under bare poles, or having at least only her great square spritsail and jib set, endeavoured to weather the rocky headland to the east, and gain their little harbour, within which the water lay smooth as a mill-pond, forming by its placidity a strong contrast to the boiling and heaving ocean without.

The last rays of the September sun had died away on the pine-clad hills of Christiana and the cathedral spire of Bergen. Night came on sooner than usual, and the sky was rendered opaque by sable clouds, through which the red streaks of lightning shot red and fork-like; while the hollow thunder reverbe-

rated afar off among the splintered summits of the Silver-bergen.

Then through the flying vapour, where, parted by the levin brand, the misty rain poured down in torrents on the pathless sea, and the goodwives of Bergen told their beads, and muttered a "Hail Mary!" or a prayer to Saint Erick the Martyr for the souls of the poor mariners, who, they were assured, would find their graves at the bottom of the deep Skager Raek ere morning brightened on the waters of the Sound.

The royal castle of Bergen, a great square tower of vast strength and unknown antiquity, reared on a point of rock, still overlooks the town that in the year of our story was little more than a fisher hamlet. Swung in an iron grating on its battlement, a huge beacon-fire had been lighted by order of the governor to direct the struggling ship; and now the flames from the blazing mass of tarred faggots and well-oiled flax streamed like a torn banner on the stormy wind, and lit up the weatherbeaten visages of a few Danish soldiers who were grouped on the keep, glinting on their steel caps and mail shirts, and on the little brass minions and iron drakes that peeped between the timeworn embrasures.

Another group, which since sunset had been watching the strange ship, was crowded under the sheltering arch of the castle gate, watching for the dispersion of the clouds or the rising of the moon to reveal her whereabouts.

"Hans Knuber," said a young man who appeared at the wicket, and whose half military attire showed that he was captain of the king's crossbowmen at Bergen, "dost thou think she will weather the Devil's Nose on the next tack?"

"I doubt it much, Captain Konrad," replied the fisherman, removing his right hand from the pocket of his voluminous red breeches to the front of his fur cap, "unless they steer with the keep of Bergen and the spire of the bishop's church in a line; which I saw they did not do. Ugh! yonder she looms! and what a sea she shipped! How heavily her fore and after castles and all her top-hamper make her heel to leeward!"

"They who man her seem to have but small skill in pilot-craft," said one.

"By Saint Olaus!" cried another, "unless some one boards and pilots her, another quarter of an hour will see her run full plump on the reef; and then God assoilzie both master and mariner!"

“Luff—luff—timoneer!” exclaimed the first seaman. “Now keep her full! Would I had my hands on thy tiller!”

“Every moment the night groweth darker,” said the young man whom they called Konrad, and whom they treated with marked respect; “as the clouds darken, the lightning brightens. A foul shame it were to old Norway, to have it said that so many of us—stout fellows all—stood idly and saw yonder struggling ship lost for lack of a little pilot-craft: for as thou sayest, Hans, if she runs so far again eastward on the next tack she must strike on the sunken reefs.”

“No boat could live in such a sea,” muttered the fishermen as they drew back, none appearing solicitous of the selection which they expected the young man would make.

“The mists are coming down from the Arctic ocean—the west wind always brings them,” said Jans Thorson; “and we all know ’tis in these mists that the spirits of the mountain and storm travel.”

“Come hither, Hans Knuber,” said the captain, whose plumed cap and rich dress of scarlet velvet, trimmed with white fur, and braided with silver like a hussar pelisse, were rapidly changing their hues under the drenching rain that lashed the castle wall, and hissed through the deep-mouthed archway. “Come hither, thou great seahorse! Dost mean to tell me thou art afraid?”

“Sir captain, I fear neither the storm nor the spirit of the mist; but Zernebok the lord of evil may be abroad to-night, and he and the Hermit of the Rock may chance to remember how once in my cups, like an ass as I was, I reviled and mocked them both.”

“Bah!” retorted Konrad, whose superstition did not go so far as that of the seaman; “Jans Thorson, I will give thee this silver chain to launch and put forth to yonder ship. Come, man—away, for the honour of old Norway!”

“Not for all the silver in yonder hills, sir captain, nor the copper in the mines of Fahlun to boot, would I trust myself beyond the Devil’s Nose to-night,” said the old fisherman bluntly. “I have just refused Master Sueno, the chamberlain.”

“Why, ’twas just in such a storm old Christian Alborg, and his stout ship the *Biornen*, were blown away into the wide ocean,” said another; “and I marvel much, noble Konrad, that you would urge poor fellows like us—”

“On a venture which I would not attempt myself!” exclaimed

the young man, whose dark blue eyes flashed at his own suggestion. "Now, Saint Olaus forefend thou shouldst say so!"

"Nay, noble Konrad—"

"But thou dost think so?"

The fisherman was silent.

A flush crossed the handsome face of Konrad of Saltzberg. He looked seaward a moment. The wind was roaring fearfully among the bare summits of the cliffs that towered abruptly from the shore to the very clouds—absolute mountains of rock rising peak above peak; and when the blue lightning flashed among them, their granite tops were seen stretching away in the distance, while the giant pines that flourished in their clefts and gorges, were tossing like black ostrich feathers in the storm.

At the harbour mouth the waves of snow-white foam were visible through the gloom, as they lashed, and hissed, and burst in successive mountains on the rocks of worn granite that fringed the entrance of the haven.

Konrad cast a rapid glance around him, and the appalling fury of the northern storm made even his gallant heart waver for a moment in its generous purpose; but a fair female face, that with all its waving ringlets appeared at a little casement overlooking the portal, and a kiss wafted to him from "a quick small hand," decided him. His eyes sparkled, and turning briskly round to the fishermen, he said, "By my honour, sirs, though knowing less of pilot-craft than of handling the boll of an arblast, I will prove to you that I require nothing of any man that I dare not myself attempt, so thus will I put forth alone, and even if I perish shame you all."

And, throwing aside his sword and short mantle, the young man rushed down the steep pathway that led to the little pier, and leaped on board one of the long light whale-boats that lay there; but ere his ready hand had quite cast off the rope that bound it to a ringbolt on the mole, both Hans Knuber and Jans Thorson, fired by his example, sprang on board, and with more of the action of elephants, in their wide fur boots and mighty breeches, than the agility of seamen, they seized each an oar, and pushed off.

In Denmark and Norway, there were and are few titles of honour; but there has always existed in the latter an untitled nobility, like our Scottish lairds and English squires, consisting of very old families, who are more highly revered than those

ennobled by Norway's Danish rulers ; and many of these can trace their blood back to those terrible vikingr, or ocean kings, who were so long the conquerors of the English Saxons, and the scourge of the Scottish shores.

Konrad of the Saltzberg (for he had no other name than that which he took from a solitary and half-ruined tower overlooking the fiord) was the representative of one of those time-honoured races.

The fame his brave ancestors had won under the enchanted banner of Regner Lodbrog, Erick with the bloody axe, and Sigwardis Ring, yet lived in the songs and stories of the northern harpers ; and Konrad was revered for these old memories of Norway's ancient days ; while his own bravery, affability, and handsome exterior, gained him the love of the Norse burghers of Bergen, the Danish bowmen he commanded, the fishermen of the fiord, and the huntsmen of the woods of Aggerhuis.

By the glare of the beacon on the castle wall, his boat was briefly seen amid the deepening gloom as it rose on the heaving swell, and the broad-bladed oars of his lusty companions flashed as they were dipped in the sparkling water. A moment, and a moment only, they were visible ; Konrad was seen to move his plumed cap, and his cheerful hallo was heard ; the next, they had vanished into obscurity.

The fishers gazed on the gloom with intensity, but could discover nothing ; and there was no other sound came on the bellying wind, save the roar of the resounding breakers, as they broke on the impending bluffs.

CHAPTER II.

ERICK ROSENKRANTZ.

THE hall of the castle of Bergen was a spacious but rude apartment, spanned by a stone arch, ribbed with massive groins, that sprung from the ponderous walls.

Its floor was composed of oak planks, and two clumsy stone columns, surmounted by grotesque capitals, supported the round archway of the fireplace, above which was a rudely carved, and still more rudely painted, shield, bearing the

golden lion of ancient Norway in a field *gules*. Piled within the arch lay a heap of roots and billets, blazing and rumbling in the recesses of the great stone chimney. Eight tall candles, each like a small flambeau, flared in an iron candelabrum, and sputtered in the currents of air that swept through the hall.

Various weapons hung on the rough walls of red sandstone; there were heavy Danish ghisarmas or battle-axes of steel, iron mauls, ponderous maces, and deadly morglays, two-handed swords of enormous length, iron bucklers, chain hauberks, and leathern surcoats, all of uncouth fashion, and fully two hundred years behind the arms then used by the more southern nations of Europe.

The long table occupying the centre of the hall was of wood that had grown in the forests of Memel; it was black as ebony with age, and the clumsy chairs and stools that were ranged against the walls were all of the same homely material. Several deerskins were spread before the hearth, and thereon reposed a couple of shaggy wolf-hounds, that ever and anon cocked their ears when a louder gust than usual shook the hall windows, or when the rain swept the feathery soot down the wide chimney to hiss in the sparkling fire.

Near the hearth stood a chair covered with gilded leather, and studded with brass nails; and so different was its aspect from the rest of the unornamented furniture, that there was no difficulty in recognising it as the seat of state. A long sword, the silver hilt of which was covered with a curious network of steel, hung by an embroidered baldric on one knob thereof, balanced by a little velvet cap adorned with a long scarlet feather, on the other.

The proprietor of these articles, a stout old man, somewhere about sixty-five, whose rotundity had been considerably increased by good living, was standing in the arched recess of a well-grated window, peering earnestly out upon the blackness of the night, in hope to discern some trace of that strange vessel, concerning which all Bergen was agog. His complexion was fair and florid; and, though his head was bald and polished, the long hair that hung from his temples, and mingled with his bushy beard and heavy moustaches, was, like them, of a decided yellow; but his round visage was of the ruddiest and most weatherbeaten brown. There was a bold and frank expression in his keen blue eye, that with his air and aspect forcibly

realised the idea of those Scandinavian vikings who were once the tyrants of Saxons, and the terror of the Scots.

His flowing robe of scarlet cloth, trimmed with black fur, and laced with gold, his Norwayn anlace or dagger, sheathed in crimson leather sown with pearls, and the large rowelled spurs that glittered on the heels of his Muscovite leather boots, announced him one of Norway's untitled noblesse. He was Erick Rosenkrantz, of Welsöö, governor of the province of Aggerhuis, castellan of Bergen, and knight of the Danish orders of the Elephant and Dannebrog.

"Sueno Thronkson," said he to a little old man who entered the hall, muffled in a mantle of red deerskin, which was drenched with rain, "dost thou think there is any chance of yonder strange bark weathering the storm, and getting under the lee of our ramparts?"

"I know not, noble sir," replied Sueno, casting his drenched cloak on the floor, and displaying his under attire, which (saith the Magister Absalom Beyer, whose minute narrative we follow) consisted of a green cloth gaberline, trimmed with the fur of the black fox, and girt at the waist by a broad belt, sustaining a black bugle-horn and short hunting sword. "I have serious doubts; for the waves of the fiord are combating with the currents from the Skager Rack, and whirling like a maelstrom. I have been through the whole town of Bergen; but neither offer nor bribe—no, not even the bishop's blessing, a hundred pieces of silver, and thrice as many deer-hides—will induce one of the knavish fishermen or white-livered pilots to put forth a boat to pick up any of these strangers, who must all drown the moment their ship strikes; and strike she must, if the wind holds."

"The curse of Saint Olaus be on them!" grumbled the governor, glancing at a rude image of Norway's tutelary saint.

"Amen!" added Sueno, as he wrung the wet tails of his gaberline.

"Didst thou try threats, then?"

"By my soul, I did so; and with equal success."

"Dost thou gibe me, Thronkson? This to me, the governor of Aggerhuis, and captain of the king's castle of Bergen!" muttered the portly official, walking to and fro, and swelling with importance as he spoke.

"The oldest of our fishermen are ready to swear on the blessed Gospels that there has not been seen such a storm since

Christian Alborg, in the *Biornen*, was blown from his moorings."

"Under the ramparts of this, the King's castle, by foul sorcery; and on the vigil of Saint Erick the king, and martyr too! I remember it well, Sueno. But what! is the old Norse spirit fallen so far, that these villains have become so economical of their persons that they shrink from a little salt water? and that none will launch a shallop in such a night to save these poor strangers, who, unless they know the coast, will assuredly run full tilt on the Devil's Nose at the haven mouth? By Saint Olaus! I can see the white surf curling over its terrible ridge, through the gloom, even at this moment."

"I said all this, noble sir," replied Sueno, brushing the rain from his fur bonnet; "but none attended to me, save young Konrad of the Saltzberg, the Captain of our Danish crossbowmen, who cursed them for white-livered coistrils; and, launching a boat, with Hans Knuber and Jans Thorson the pilot, pushed off from the mole, like brave hearts as they are, in the direction of the labouring ship, which Konrad vowed to pilot round the Devil's Nose or perish."

"Fool! and thou only tellest me of this now! Konrad, the boldest youth and the best in all old Norway!" exclaimed the burly governor. "Hah! and hath the last of an ancient and gallant race to peril his life on such a night as this, when these baseborn drawers of nets and fishers of seals hang back?"

"His boat vanished into the gloom in a moment, and we heard but one gallant blast from his bugle ring above the roar of the waves that boil round that terrible promontory."

"The Mother of God pray for him—brave lad! What the devil! Sueno, I would not for all the ships in the northern seas, a hair of Konrad's head were injured; for, though he is no kin to me, I love the lad as if he were mine own and only son. See that my niece Anna knoweth not of this wild adventure till he return safe. She has seemed somewhat cold to him of late; some lover's pique—"

"I pray he *may* return, Sir Erick."

"He must—he *shall* return!" rejoined the impetuous old knight, stamping his foot. "Yea, and in safety too, or I will sack Bergen, and scourge every fisher in it. From whence thought these knaves the stranger came?"

"From Denmark."

"Malediction on Denmark!" said Rosenkrantz, feeling his old Norse prejudices rising in his breast. "Assure me that she is Danish, and I will extinguish the beacon, and let them all drown and be——!"

"Nay, nay, Sir Governor, they know her to be a good ship of Scotland, commanded by a certain great lord of that country, who is on an embassy to Frederick of Denmark, and hath been cruising in these seas."

"Then my double malediction on the Scots, too!" said the governor, as he turned away from the hall window.

"And so say I, noble sir," chimed in the obsequious chamberlain, as he raised the skirts of his gaberdine, and warmed his voluminous trunk hosen before the great fire.

"Right, Thronkson! though eight of our monarchs are buried in Iona, under the Ridge of the Kings, the death of Cœlus of Norway, who is graved in the Scottish Kyles, still lives in our songs; and the fatal field of Largs, when, aided by such a storm as this, the Scots laid Haco's enchanted banner in the waves."

"And the wars of Erick with the bloody axe."

"And of Harold Graafeldt, his son."

"And Magnus with the Barefeet," continued the old man, whose eyes gleamed at the names of these savage kings of early Scandinavia.

"Enough, Sueno," said the governor, who was again peering from the window into the darkness; "enough, or thou wilt fire my old Norse heart in such wise by these fierce memories, that no remnant of Christian feeling will remain in it. After all, it matters not, Scots or Danes, we ought to pray for the souls that are now, perhaps, from yonder dark abyss, ascending to the throne of God unblessed and unconfessed," added the old knight, with a sudden burst of religious feeling.

"God assoil them!" added Sueno, crossing himself, and becoming pious too.

From the windows of the hall little else was seen but the dark masses of cloud that flew hither and thither on the stormy wind; at times a red star shot a tremulous ray through the openings, and was again hidden. Far down, beneath the castle windows, boiled the fierce ocean, and its white foam was visible when the lofty waves reared up their crested heads to lash the impending cliffs; but we have said that the bosom of the har-

hour was smooth as a summer lake when compared with the tumult of the Fiord of Christiana. Overhead, showers of red sparks were swept away through the gloom, from the beacon that blazed on the keep to direct the waveworn ship.

"What led Hans Knuber and his brother knave of the net, to deem the stranger was a Scot? By her lumbering leeboard I would have sworn she was a Lubecker."

"Nay, sir, her high fore and after castles marked her Scottish build; and both Hans Knuber and Jans Thorson, who have eyes for these matters, and have traded to Kirkwall—yea, and even to that Scottish sea the fiord of Forth—averred she bore Saint Andrew's saltire flying at her mizen-peak. I see nothing of her now," continued Sueno.

"See! why, 'tis so dark, one cannot see the length of one's own nose. They must have perished!"

At that moment the flash of a culverin glared amid the obscurity far down below; but its report was borne away on the wind that roared down the narrow fiord to bury its fury in the Skager Rack.

"God and St. Olaus be praised!" muttered the old knight, rubbing his hands; "they are almost within the haven mouth; another moment, and they will be safe."

"Thou forgettest, noble sir," said the chamberlain, "that the stranger's pilot may be unacquainted with the nooks and crooks of our harbour, the rocks and reefs that fringe it, and that the water in some parts is two hundred fathoms deep."

"Saidst thou not that Konrad and Hans Knuber had put off in a boat?"

"True, true! A ray of light is shining on the water now."

"Whence comes it?"

"'Tis the hermit in the cavern under the rocks, who hath lit a beacon on the beach to direct the benighted ship."

"Saint Olaf bless him! Hoh! there goeth the culverin again. We heard the report this time. They are saved! 'Tis Konrad of Saltzberg hath done this gallant deed, and Heaven reward him! for many a poor fellow had perished else. Now that they are in safe anchorage, away Sueno Thronson, take thy chamberlain's staff and chain, man a boat, board this seaworn ship, and invite this Scottish lord to Bergen; for a foul shame it were in a knight of the Elephant, to permit the ambassador of a queen to remain on shipboard after such a storm,

and within a bowshot of his Danish majesty's castle: he would be worse than Finns or Muscovites. Away, Sueno! for now the storm is lulling, and under the lee of its high hills the harbour is smooth as a mirror."

Thus commanded, Sueno unwillingly enveloped himself once more in the before-mentioned fur-mantle, and retired.

A blast of his horn was heard to ring in the yard as he summoned certain followers, who grumbled and swore in guttural Norse as they scrambled after him down the steep and winding pathway, that led from the castle gate to the mole of Bergen.

CHAPTER III.

THE STRANGERS.

"How now, Anna! thou lookest as pale as if all the gnomes of the Silverbergen, or Nippen and Zernebok to boot, had been about thee. Art thou affrighted by the storm, child?" asked Erick, pinching the soft cheek of his niece, who, at that moment had entered the hall, and glided to his side in one of the great windows.

Her only reply was to clasp her hands upon his arm, and look up in his face with a fond smile.

Anna Rosenkrantz was the only daughter of Svend of Aggerhuis, the governor's younger brother, who had fallen in battle with the Holsteiners. In stature she was rather under the middle height; and so full and round was her outline, that many might have considered it too much so, but for the exquisite fairness of her skin, the beauty of her features, and the grace pervading every motion. Norway is famed for its fair beauties, but the lustre of Anna's complexion was dazzling; her neck and forehead were white as the unmelting snows of the Dovrefeldt. From under the lappets of a little velvet cap, which was edged by a row of Onslo pearls, her dark-brown ringlets flowed in heavy profusion, and seemed almost black when contrasted with the neck on which they waved. Her eyes were of a decided grey, dark, but clear and sparkling. The curve of her mouth and chin were very piquant and arch in expression; her smile was ever one of surpassing sweetness, and at times of coquetry.

A jacket of black velvet, fashioned like a Bohemian vest, trimmed with narrow edgings of white fur, and studded with seed pearls, displayed the full contour of her beautiful bust; but unhappily her skirt was one of those enormous fardingales which were then becoming the rage over all Europe.

"Have the roaring of the wind and the screaming of the water-sprite scared thee, Anna?" continued the old man, who like a true Norlander, believed every element to be peopled by unseen spirits and imps. "By the bones of Lodbrog!" he added, patting her soft cheek with his huge bony hand, "my mind misgave me much that this last year's sojourn at the palace of Kiøbenhavn would fairly undo thee."

"How, good uncle?" said Anna, blushing slightly.

"By tainting thine inbred hardiment of soul, my little damsel, and making thee, instead of a fearless Norse maiden, and a dweller in the land of hills and cataracts, like one of those sickly moppets whom I have seen clustered round the tabouret of Frederick's queen, when, for my sins, I spent a summer at his court during the war with Christian II., that tyrant and tool of the Dutch harlot, Sigiberta."

"Indeed, uncle mine, you mistake me," replied Anna, "though I will own myself somewhat terrified by this unwonted storm."

"There now! said I not so? Three years ago, would the screaming of the eagles, the yelling of the wood-demon, the howl of the wind, or the tumult of the ocean, when all the spirits of the Skager Rack are rolling its billows on the rocks, have affrighted thee? Bah! what is there so terrible in all that? Do not forget, my girl, that thou comest of a race of sea-kings who trace their blood from O'Ivarre—he who with Andd and Olaff ravaged all the Scottish shores from Thurso to the Clyde, and once even placed the red lion of Norway on the double-dun of Alchuyd.* But I warrant thou art only terrified for young Konrad, who, like a gallant Norseman, hath run his life into such deadly peril."

"Konrad—tush!" said Anna pettishly.

"Ay, Konrad!" reiterated Erick testily; "which way doth the wind blow now? By my soul, damosel, thou takest very quietly the danger in which the finest young fellow in all Norway

* A.D. 870 (Note by Mag. Absalom Beyer)

has thrust himself—when even the boldest of our fishers drew back. He departed in a poor shallop to guide yonder devilish ship round the dangerous promontory, and if the blessed saints have not prevailed over the spirits of evil, who make their bourne in the caverns of that dark ocean—then I say, God help thee, Konrad of Saltzberg! But fear not, Anna,” continued the old man kindly, perceiving that she turned away as if to conceal tears; “for thy lover is stout of heart and strong of hand—and—there now!—the devil’s in my old gossiping tongue—pest upon it! I have made thee weep.”

Anna’s breast heaved very perceptibly, and she covered her face, *not* to conceal her tears, but the smile that spread over her features.

“Come, damosel—away to thy toilet; for know there is in yonder ship which we have watched the livelong day, and which has escaped destruction so narrowly, a certain great lord, who this night shall sup with us; for I have sent Sueno with a courteous message, inviting him to abide, so long as it pleases him, in the king’s castle of Bergen. Be gay, Anna; for I doubt not thou wilt be dying to hear tidings of what is astir in the great world around Aggerhuis; for, during the last month since thy return here, thou hast moped like some melancholy oyster on the frozen cape yonder.”

“A great lord, saidst thou, uncle?” asked Anna with sudden animation.

“Of Scotland—so said Sueno.”

Anna blushed scarlet; but the momentary expression of confusion was replaced by one of pride and triumph.

“Did thou hear of any such at Frederick’s court, little one?”

“Yes—ch, yes! there were two on an embassy concerning the Isles of Shetland.”

“Ah! which that fool, Christian of Oldenburg, gave to the Scottish king with his daughter Margaret? Their names?”

“I marked them not,” replied Anna with hesitation; “for thou knowest, uncle mine, I bear no good-will unto these rough-footed Scots.”

“Keep all thy good-will for the lad who loves thee so well,” said the old man, smiling, as he pressed his wiry moustaches against her white forehead. “I see thou hast still the old Norse spirit, Anna. Though three centuries have come and gone since the field of Largs was lost by Haco and his host,

we have not forgotten it; and vengeance for that day's slaughter and defeat still forms no small item in our oaths of fealty and of knighthood. But hark! the horn of Sueno! There are torches flashing on the windows, and strange voices echoing in the court. Away, girl! and bring me my sword and collars of knighthood from yonder cabinet; for I must receive these guests as becomes the king's representative at Aggerhuis, and captain of his castle of Bergen."

Anna glided from his side, and in a minute returned with a casket from the cabinet, and the long heavy sword that lay on the chair at the fireplace. She clasped the rich waistbelt round the old man's burly figure, and drawing from the casket the gold chain with the diamond *Elephant*, having under its feet the enamelled motto—

"*Trew is Wilbbraf,*"—

and the woven collar bearing the red cross of the Dannebrog, she placed them round Sir Erick's neck, and the jewels sparkled brightly among the red hair of his bushy beard.

She then glanced hurriedly at her own figure in an opposite mirror; adjusted the jaunty little cap before mentioned; ran her slender fingers through her long dark ringlets; smiled with satisfaction at her own beauty; and took her seat on a low tabouret near the great stuffed chair, between the gilded arms of which the pompous old governor wedged his rotund figure, with an energy that made his visage flush scarlet to the temples; and he had barely time to assume his most imposing aspect of official dignity, when the light of several flambeaux flashed through the dark doorway at the lower end of the hall, and the handsome commander of his crossbowmen, Konrad of Saltzberg, with his features pale from fatigue, and his long locks, like his furred pelisse, damp with salt water, and Sueno wearing his gold chain and key, having his white wand uplifted, and attended by several torch-bearers in the king's livery, preceded the strangers.

The first who approached was a tall and handsome man, in whose strong figure there was a certain jaunty air, that suited well the peculiar dare-devil expression of his deep dark eye, which bespoke the confirmed man of pleasure. He seemed to be about thirty years of age, and was clad in a shining doublet of cloth of gold, over which he wore a cuirass of the finest steel,

attached to the backplate by braces of burnished silver. His mantle was of purple velvet lined with white satin; his trunk breeches were of the latter material slashed with scarlet silk, and were of that enormous fashion then so much in vogue, being so preposterously stuffed with tow, hair, or bombast, as to render even greaves useless in battle. He wore a long sword and Scottish dagger. His blue velvet bonnet was adorned by a diamond aigrette, from which sprung three tall white ostrich feathers. His eyes were keen, dark, and proud, and their brows nearly met over his nose, which was straight; he wore little beard, but his moustaches were thick, and pointed upward. His page, a saucy-looking lad of sixteen, whom he jocularly called Nick (for his name was Nicholas Hubert), came close behind him; he was richly attired, and bore a very handsome salade of polished steel.

His companion, who deferentially remained a few paces behind, was also richly clad in the same extravagant fashion. His complexion was swarthy and dark as that of a Spanish Moor. His peaked beard, his enormous moustaches and short curly hair, were of the deepest black, and his dark hazel eyes were fierce, keen, and restless in expression. In addition to his sword and dagger, which were of unusual length, he carried at his glittering baldrick a short wheelock caliver or dague; and in lieu of a corselet wore a pyne doublet, calculated to resist sword-cuts. He had a gorget of fine steel under his thick ruff; and we must not omit to add that his bulk and stature were gigantic, for he stood six-foot-eight in his boots.

"My lord, Sir Erick," began the chamberlain, "allow me to introduce James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell, a noble peer, ambassador from Mary, queen of the Scots, to his Danish majesty."

The portly governor of Aggerhuis bowed profoundly, each time reversing the hilt of the long toledo that hung by his voluminous trunk hose; while the graceful Earl, with a courtesy that, to a close observer, might have seemed a little overdone, swept the hall floor with his ostrich plumes as he bowed and shook the hand of the bluff old Norwegian.

"Hark you, master chamberlain," said he, "please to introduce my friend."

"My lord, Sir Erick," began Sueno.

"Cock and pie! Bothwell! he can introduce himself without

the aid of chamberlain or chamberheid," said the dark man with a bravo air. "My good lord governor, thou seest in me Hob Ormiston of that ilk, otherwise Black Hob of Teviotdale, very much at your service; and, by the holy rood!"

"Stuff!" interrupted the Earl; "know, we swear by nought but the staff of John Knox now."

"Foul fall thee, Bothwell!" said Black Hob ironically, "art thou growing profane?"

"Art *thou* turning preacher?" whispered the Earl with a laugh; "but prithee act gravely before this old Norland bear, or ill may come of it. We thank you for your gracious hospitality, fair sir," he added aloud; "and with gratitude will exchange for this noble hall, the narrow cabin of my half sinking galliot, and the black tumbling waves of yonder devilish sea."

"The king's castle of Bergen is ever at the service of the subjects of her fair Scottish majesty; and, in the name of Frederick of Zeeland, I bid you welcome to its poor accommodation."

"And now, brave youth! by whose valour we have been saved, let me thank you," said the Scottish earl, turning suddenly with generous gratitude to Konrad of Saltzberg, who had remained a little behind. "Had you not gained our ship at that desperate crisis, and directed our wavering timoneer, it had assuredly been dashed to pieces on yonder promontory."

"Yes—noble sir—the Devil's Nose," said Sueno.

"To venture in that frail shallop through the fierce surf of yonder boiling sea, was the bravest deed I ever saw man do; and remember I come from a land of brave hearts and gallant deeds."

The Earl warmly shook the hand of Konrad, who endeavoured to gain one glance from Anna, but she was too intently regarding the strangers.

In the dusky shadow formed by the projecting mantelpiece, she had stood a little apart, but now caught the eye of the Earl, who, with an air in which exquisite grace was curiously blended with assurance, advanced and kissed her hand.

"'Tis my niece," said Rosenkrantz; but the moment the light fell full upon her blushing face and beautiful figure, Bothwell started—his colour heightened, and his eyes sparkled.

"Anna—Lady Anna!" he exclaimed; "art *thou* here?"

"Welcome, my lord, to Bergen," she replied with a bright smile; "then you have not forgotten me?"

"Forgotten thee!" exclaimed the Earl, as half kneeling he again kissed her hand; "ah! how could I ever forget? This is joy indeed! How little I dreamt of meeting thee here, fair Anna; for when we parted at the palace of King Frederick, I feared it was to meet no more."

"Thou seest, my lord," she replied gaily; "that Fate never meant to separate us altogether."

"Then I will rail at Fate no more."

"When I prayed the blessed Mary to intercede for the poor ship, which all this livelong day we saw tossing on the waves of the fiord, how little did I deem my prayers were offered up for you!"

"A thousand thanks, dear lady! I too prayed, now and then; but I doubt not the blessed Virgin hath rather hearkened to thee, who in purity, beauty, and innocence may so nearly approach herself."

"Cock and pie!" muttered Ormiston through his black beard, as he yawned and stretched his stalwart form before the blazing fire; "he is at his old trade of love-making again. When a-God's name will he ever learn sense!"

"What art thou grumbling at now, Hob Ormiston?" said the Earl, laughing; "when our poor crayer went surging headlong down into the dark trough of yonder angry sea, by Saint Paul! I could not choose but laugh, to hear thee alternately praying like a devout Christian, and swearing like a rascally Pagan!"

"And all because of that enchanted rope with its three damnable knots, which, despite my warnings, your lordship purchased for a rose-noble from that villanous necromancer at Cronenborg. S'death! were I now within arm's length of him, I would tie such a knot under his left ear as would cure him of wizard wit for the future."

"How, fair sirs," asked the Castellan, whose capacity for the marvellous was quite Norwegian; "this is marvel upon marvel! I deemed ye strangers, and find that you my Lord Earl of Bothwell, and Anna my niece and ward, are quite old friends—of that I will learn anon; but meantime would fain hear more of this same enchanted cord, for which it seems we are indebted for the honour of this visit to the king's—"

"Why, Sir Governor, it brought on that infernal storm, which nearly sent us all to the bottom of the sea; and as for the base minion who sold it—"

"Harkee, Hob of Ormiston," said the Earl gaily while glancing at Anna; "I will hear nothing disrespectful said of my master of the black art, whose spells have driven me within the circle of charms a thousand degrees more powerful and enchanting."

"Coek and pie!" muttered Black Hob between his teeth.

"My lords," said the Castellan, who was bursting with impatience, "about this rope—"

"At the castle of Cronenborg," replied Bothwell, "despite the reiterated warnings of my friend, our stout skipper ventured ashore to bargain with a certain necromancer who dwelleth at the promontory, and sells fair winds to the passing ships. For a rose-noble this knave gave him a rope three Danish ells in length, whereon were three knots, each of which he solemnly avowed would produce a favourable breeze. On the first being untied, we certainly had one that carried us out of the Sound; but thereafter it died away. Our skipper cursed the wizard for his short measure, and untied the second knot, when, lo! another friendly gale rippled over the sea, and bore us to Helmstadt, off which it again fell a dead calm."

"Three handfuls of salt should have been thrown into the sea," said Sueno.

"For what?" asked Bothwell with a smile.

"Sueno is right," said Rosenkrantz. "One as an offering to Nippen, a second for the water-spirit, and a third for the demon of the wind."

"Our skipper contented himself by blaspheming like a Turk," continued the Earl, "and untied the third knot, when, lo! there blew a perfect storm. The wind and the waves rose, the rain fell, the lightning flashed among the seething breakers, and—we are here."

"I will write to the king," said the governor, striking his long sword energetically on the hall floor—"I will, by Saint Erick! and learn whether this dark-dealing villain is to be permitted to trifle with the lives of nobles and ambassadors by selling charms of evil under the windows of his very palace,"

"By my soul! Sir Governor, if I had him in bonny Teviot-

dale, I would hang him on my dule-tree, where many a better man hath swung, and make my inquiries thereafter."

"'Tis the second time this false son of darkness hath so tricked the mariner. He sold an enchanted cord to my kinsman, Christian Alborg, captain of the *Biornen*, a king's ship, which, on the untying of the third knot, was blown right out into the North Sea—yea, unto the very verge of those dangerous currents that run downhill to regions under the polar star, frozen and desolate shores, from whence there can be no return. But enough of this matter. Hark you, Sueno Thronndson, and thou, Van Dribbel the butler, see what the larder and cellar contain: order up supper for our noble guests, and see that it be such as befits well the king's castle of Bergen."

CHAPTER IV

A NORSE SUPPER.

BOTHWELL surveyed the hall with a rapid glance, and then his eyes met those of his friend and vassal, Hob of Ormiston, who had been making a similar scrutiny, and he slightly shrugged his shoulders; for mentally he had been reverting to his noble castle of Crichton, that

———"rises on the steep
Above the vale of Tyne;"

his lordly towers of Bothwell, that still, magnificent in their ruins, overlook the beautiful Clyde, and therefore he drew comparisons very disadvantageous to "the king's castle of Bergen," as the old castellan thereof was so fond of styling his residence.

"'Tis but a poor-looking hold this, my lord," said Hob in French; "yet I dare swear we may put over the night in it very well."

A shade crossed the brow of Lady Anna, as with a gentle air of pique, and in the same language, she said, "I am grieved, noble sirs, that the accommodation of our poor house displeases you."

"Cogsbones!" muttered Black Hob with confusion, but the Earl laughed.

"Ah, you know French!" he exclaimed with pleasure; "'tis delightful! I will be able to converse with you so much more fluently than in the broken Norse of the Shetlanders."

"You have been in France, doubtless?" said Anna.

"Frequently, on embassies from our late Queen Regent, Mary of Guise and Lorraine, to the Court of the magnificent Francis. Ah! some of the happiest days of my life—yes, and some of the saddest, too—have been spent in the palace of the Tournelles."

A momentary frown gathered on the Earl's brow, but was immediately replaced by a smile.

"And has your embassy from Mary of Scotland to Frederick of Denmark been accomplished happily?"

"Not as yet, fair Anna," replied Bothwell hurriedly, while his brow flushed; "for his Danish Majesty lacks much the spirit of his Scandinavian ancestors. Yet, dear madam, I cannot but deem my sojourn in this northern clime a happy one, since it ends here;" and he slightly touched her hand.

While with open mouth the old governor of Bergen had been turning alternately from his niece to the stranger, surprised to hear them conversing so fluently in a language quite unknown to him, several servants in red gaberdines and voluminous trunk breeches laid supper on the long central table; while the warmth of the hall was increased by a number of torches placed in grotesque stone brackets, projecting from the walls, on the red masonry of which they shed a ruddy glow.

The Earl courteously handed the young lady to a seat, and placed himself beside her.

Konrad had been in the act of advancing to assume his usual chair by her side; but finding himself anticipated, and feeling instinctively and sadly that perhaps he was not missed, he retired to the other end of the room, and seated himself beside the strong and swarthy knight of Ormiston.

"'Twice hath he kissed her hand this night!" thought the young man with a bitter sigh: "that hand which I have scarcely dared to touch—and twice she seemed pleased by the attention; for her cheek flushed and her eye sparkled with the brightness of her joy."

The evening repast was somewhat plain and coarse, as the governor made it his boast and pride to have everything after the ancient Norwegian fashion, and would as readily have per-

mitted poison as any foreign luxury or innovation to invade his board.

Reindeer meat, purchased from the wandering Lapps, and a trencher of pickled herrings occupied one end of the table; a venison pie the other. There was a platter of ryemeal pudding, another of sharke, or meat cut into thin slices, sprinkled with spices, and dried in the wind; there were rye-loaves, baked so hard that they would have required King Erick's axe to split them, and crisped pancakes, and rolls made of meal, mixed with bark of the pine, dried and ground. There were preserved wild fruits and cloud-berries, floating in thick cream; but the only liquors were Norwegian ale and the native dricka, a decoction of barley and juniper-tree.

Bothwell, who, as we have said, had seated himself beside the Lady Anna and was wholly occupied with her, scarcely remarked the rudeness of the repast; but hungry Hob of Ormiston, whose whole and undivided affections were about to be lavished on the table, looked exceedingly blank, and the aspect of the venison pie and trencher of purple cloud-berries, swimming in thick yellow cream, alone prevented him from exhibiting some very marked signs of disdain.

Supper proceeded, and was partaken of with due Scandinavian voracity. The portly governor of Aggerhuis wedged himself in his gilded chair at the head of the table; Sueno the chamberlain seated himself at the foot. Cornelius Van Dribbel, the bulbous-shaped Dutch butler of Bergen, overlooked the cups and tankards; and to the company already mentioned, who occupied seats *above* the salt, were added a few Danish crossbowmen in the scarlet livery of King Frederick, with Hans Knuber, Jans Thorson, and the servants of the fortress, who devoured vast quantities of sharke and oatmeal bread, drenching their red moustaches in the muddy ale as deeply as their ancestors, the fair-haired warriors of Olaff and of Ivarre, could have done.

This motley company were assisted to whatever they required by four pages, who bore the king's cipher embossed on the breasts of their crimson doublets, which had those of Erick Rosenkrantz similarly wrought on the back.

Bothwell, who had been accustomed to all those continental luxuries, which the long and close intercourse with France had introduced among the Scottish noblesse, exchanged but one furtive glance of scorn with the tall knight of Teviotdale, and then

proceeded at once to gain the heart of the honest and unsophisticated governor, by draining a long horn of ale, to the standard toast of the Norlanders—"Old Norway!"

"*Gammle Norgé!*" cried the old governor, and all present emptied their cups with enthusiasm, not excepting the Danes; for the keen eye of Rosenkrantz was fixed upon them in particular.

Oblivious of the presence of the burly governor, of young Konrad's changing cheek and kindling eye, of bearded Ormiston's lowering visage, and all others round the board, the Earl of Bothwell, with all the nonchalance of a soldier united to the suavity of a courtier, and the air of a man who habitually pleased himself without valuing a jot the ideas of others, was soon seen to make himself quite at home, to lounge on the stuffed chair, and to stoop his head so close to Anna's, that at times his black locks mingled with her glossier curls as they conversed softly in French, but with a rapidity and gaiety that astonished even themselves.

She was thus enabled to coquette, and he to make love with impunity, under the very eyes of Konrad and her uncle. The former was painfully watchful, but the latter divided his attention between a dish of savoury sharke and a great pewter flagon of dricka; for, like a true old Norseman, he was capable of eating anything and in any quantity; and he paused at times only to impress upon Sueno Thronson the necessity of having the necromancer of Cronenborg strung up in one of his own cords.

"Holy Hansdag!" said he; "such things cannot be permitted. Vessels will never pass the Sound, and the toll will go to the devil! Konrad of Saltzberg, thou art a bold lad, and hast done gallant things in these seas against the Lubeckers and to thee will I commit the charge of conveying this knave in fetters to King Frederick."

"If he sells fair winds, Sir Erick," began Konrad.

"Ah! but the dark son of Zernebok selleth foul as well."

"But only to strangers, and when he has none other in hand, perhaps," said Konrad, with a smile; for he cordially wished that the enchanted cord had blown the Scottish earl to the Arctic regions.

"Tush, Konrad! dost thou deem my kinsman, stout Christian Alborg of the *Biornen*, a stranger?"

"We Scots have an old saw among us—That 'tis an ill wind that blows nobody gude," said Hob Ormiston, as he once more assailed the crisp roof of the venison pie with his long Scottish dagger; for it was not then the fashion to furnish guests with knives, and forks were the invention of a century later. "By the mass!" thought he; "the rascal Cupid will assuredly mar thy fortune, my stout Lord Bothwell; for thou fallest in love with every pretty woman, and art ever in some infernal scrape. Thy health, Sir Governor," and bowing to Rosenkrantz, who warmly accorded, Ormiston raised to his lips a great flagon of ale, the creamy froth of which whitened the thick bristles of his black moustaches.

Bothwell and Anna still continued to converse in French.

"And so monsieur grew tired of the court of Denmark?" said Anna, with a pretty lisp in her voice.

"When you left it I soon found that little remained to detain me there. For me the sun had set—the glory had departed. I was *ennuyé*d to death, for there are no amusements such as I have been accustomed to. I marvel that so warlike a prince as Frederick holds not at times a passage of arms, or even a grand hunting party, among his knights and peers. The greasy counts and ale-swilling barons who wear the crosses of the Elephant and Dannebrog, throng the chambers of his great wooden palace; but never one among them rouses a deer in the woods of Amack, brings a boar to bay, or breaks a spear at the barriers."

"You should have set them an example, my lord," said Anna, with a half pout which she assumed at times.

"These drunken Danes would have laughed me to scorn, for they were much too wary to trust their fools' costards under steel casques for such a purpose. They never in any age knew much of chivalry; and now the new doctrines of Luther and of Calvin, like a cold blast, are laying it with other and holier institutions in the dust. I regret that I did not hang on Frederick's palace gate my red shield, with the blue cheveron of Hepburn, as a bravado to all comers," continued the flattering Earl, in his softest and most insinuating French; while he took in his the white hand of the blushing girl, "in maintenance that Anna of Aggerhuis was the fairest flower in Norway and in Denmark."

"By cock and pie! it might have hung there 'till doomsday

for aught that I would have cared anent the matter," muttered Hob Ormiston.

The eyes of Anna lighted up with that vanity which the language of the Earl was so well calculated to feed, as she laughed, and said, in a low and almost breathless voice—

"And would you indeed have maintained this?"

"At the point of this sword, which my goodsire drew by Pinkie-burn, I would have upheld it, madam—yea, to the last gasp!"

"I thank your courtesy, my Lord Bothwell; but," she asked, in a manner that seemed perfectly artless, "what could inspire so much bravery and enthusiasm in my behalf?"

"Ah, what but love!" whispered the handsome Earl, while his dark eyes filled with the softest languor. Anna blushed crimson, and a pause ensued.

A shade imperceptibly crossed the brow of Konrad. He had picked up a smattering of French while commanding his band of crossbowmen in the Lubeck war, and knew enough to perceive how dangerous to the love he had so long borne Anna, was the tendency of this discourse.

"My lord," said he, with an anger which he could not entirely conceal, "with an intent so foolish, I fear your red shield would have hung on Frederiek's gate like the wood-demon's annual axe—till it rusted away, ere any man would have touched it."

"Sir Konrad," replied the Earl haughtily, "you may be right, for none will dare dispute the beauty of Lady Anna."

"Why not?" asked Konrad with blunt honesty. "Beauty exists often in the mind of a lover alone; and all men cannot love the same woman."

The Earl smiled, and twirled his moustaches.

"Noble Sir, though I can very well perceive how you secretly scorn our northern barbarism, there are those among us who could achieve feats that the bravest and gayest of the French and Scottish knights would shrink from attempting."

Bothwell raised his eyebrows slightly, and a very unmistakeable frown gathered on tall Ormiston's swarthy brow; but here very opportunely old Rosenkrantz, pausing in the midst of some enthusiastie speech, shouted, "*Gammle Norgé!*" and struck his empty flagon on the table.

"Ho!" said the Earl, "my brave friend, thou seemest a tall fellow, and art used, I doubt not, to mail and arms?"

“A little to the use of the *salade*, steel hauberk, cross-bow, and dagger.”

“And art a good horseman, both at the *baresse* and on the battle-field?” added Bothwell, with a slight tinge of scorn in his manner.

“He knows not what you mean by *baresse*,” said Anna, with a laugh that stung Konrad to the soul. The Earl joined in it; and then, fired by sudden anger and energy, the blood mounted to Konrad’s open brow, as he replied—

“Whatever a man will dare without the aid of spell or charm, that will I dare, and, perhaps, achieve; and though, Sir Scot, I can perceive by thine undisguised hauteur that thou scornest our rude Norse fashions and primitive simplicity, I cannot forget that there are spirits bred among these stupendous cliffs and pine-clad valleys, these boiling maelstroms and foaming torrents, second to none in the world for bravery, for honour, and for worth. I, who am the least among them in strength of heart and limb, can climb a rock that hangs eight hundred feet above the dashing surf, to win the down of the eider-duck or the eggs of the owl and eagle. With a handful of salt I can train a wild-deer from the solitary dens of the Silverbergen, or drag a white bear from its bourn on the banks of the Agger. With a single bolt from my arblast, I can pierce the swiftest eagle in full flight, and the fiercest boar with one thrust of my hunting-spear. On midsummer eve, when Nippen and all the spirits of evil are abroad, I have sought the Druid’s circle in the most savage depths of the Dovrefeldt, to hang the wood-demon’s yearly gift on the great oak where our pagan ancestors worshipped Thor of old, and offered up the blood of captives taken in battle. And, in pursuit of the seal and the seahorse, I have dashed my boat right through the mist of the Fiord, even while the shriek of Uldra, the spirit of the vapour, arose from its dusky bosom.”

Though superstitious to a degree, Bothwell could not repress a smile on hearing what Konrad deemed a climax to the assertion of his spirit and courage. The eyes of Anna sparkled with something of admiration as he spoke; but the Earl laughed with provoking good-nature as he replied—

“I doubt not thy courage, my friend, since to it I owe my seat at this hospitable board, instead of being, perhaps, at the bottom of yonder deep fiord; but the white bear—ha! ha! I

would give a score of gold unicorns to see thee, Black Hob, engaging such a denizen of old Norway."

"Nordland bear or boor, what the foul fiend care I?" replied Ormiston, whose mouth was still crammed with paste. "God's death! many a time and oft, in bonny Teviotdale and Ettrick-shaws, I have driven a tough Scottish spear through a brave English heart, piercing acton, jack, and corselet of Milan, like a gossamer web. But enow of this pitiful boasting, which better beseemeth schulebairns than bearded men."

Now the night waxed late, the great wooden clock at the end of the hall had struck the hour for retiring, and sliced sweet-cake and spiced ale were served round.

Then all the company, after the Norwegian fashion, bowed to each other, and saying, "Much good may the supper do you," prepared to separate. The Earl and Ormiston were conducted, by Sueno Thronson and two torchbearers, to a chamber in the upper part of the keep.

As Konrad turned to retire, he gave a wistful glance at Anna Rosenkrantz, to receive, as usual, her parting smile; but her eyes were fixed on Bothwell's retreating figure and waving plume, and slowly the young man left the hall, with a heart full of jealous and bitter thoughts.

CHAPTER V.

THE EARL AND HOB DISCOURSE.

THE Scottish guests were escorted by the chamberlain to an apartment in the donjon-tower, immediately above the hall.

It was arched with red sandstone, and, as frequently occurred in the sleeping chambers of such edifices in that age, contained two beds. These were low four-posted and heavily-canopied couches, covered with eider-down quilts of elaborate pattern; while the oak floor, according to the fashion of the country, was thickly strewn with small juniper branches, instead of straw, as in England. A dim cresset, on a long iron stalk, lighted the chamber, on beholding the primitive aspect of which the Earl and his friend exchanged significant glances; while Sueno, in courtesy to their rank, placed a handsome sword on a low tabourette that stood midway between the couches, and retired.

"'Tis a pretty knife this!" said Hob of Ormiston, as he drew the shining blade from its scabbard and surveyed it; "however, I would rather have this berry-brown whinger, that my father drew on Flodden Field," he added, unbuckling the broad baldrick that sustained his immense two-handed sword. "Doth he not seem an honest soul, this old Norwegian boor, I mean baron—craving pardon—and his dumpy little daughter?"

"Nicee, thou meanest," said Bothwell suddenly, becoming all attention.

"One must speak cautiously of her, I suppose?"

"It would be wise of more than one; but," said Bothwell, "is it not remarkable that we should meet thus again? What seest thou in this?"

"In what?"

"Our unexpected meeting, after parting as we thought for ever."

"See!" yawned Ormiston, untrussing his points, "why—nothing!"

"Insensible! dost thou not see the hand of Fate?"

"Nay," said Hob ironically: "my Lord of Bothwell and of Hailes, I can perceive only the finger of mischief."

"Anna is very beautiful."

"After the fat and languid dames of Denmark, with their red locks and gaudy dresses," said Ormiston, as he slipped into bed, "there is, I own, something quite refreshing to my refined taste——"

"Thy refined taste, ha! ha!" laughed the Earl.

"I say to *my* refined taste," continued Hob testily, "in the grace and delicacy of this northern nymph."

"And I own to thee, Hob of Ormiston, my true vassal and most trusted friend, that all my old passion is revived in full force, and that I love her as I never loved"——

"Even Jane of Huntly," said Black Hob, maliciously closing the sentence.

"Under favour, as thou lovest me, Hob," said the noble with a frown, "say no more of her, just now at least."

"Ha! ha! after seeing the beauties of the Tournelles, of Versailles, and even our own Holyrood, thou art seriously smitten by this little Norwegian, ch?"

"My whole heart and soul are hers," said the Earl in a voice that was low, but full of passion.

"Now may the great devil burn me!" cried Ormiston, as a horse-laugh convulsed his bulky figure. "I think 'tis the twentieth time thy heart hath been disposed of in the same fashion, and I do not think that any damsel found herself much enriched by the possession thereof. As for thy soul, that being as I believe gifted already——"

"Harkee, Hob, be not insolent, for our swords are lying at hand. Oh, yes! from the first moment I met this fair girl at Copenhagen, a mysterious sympathy drew my heart instinctively towards her; and not until she left the court of Frederick did I find the full depth of my passion."

"Substitute Holyrood for Copenhagen," continued Hob in the same glib tone, "and this will be almost word for word what I once heard thee whisper to winsome Jeanie Gordon in the long gallery."

"Damnation, varlet! thou wilt drive me mad," cried the Earl, kicking his trunk-hose to the farthest end of the chamber; for the spiced ale of Van Dribbel was mounting fast into his brain. "How dared your curiosity presume so far? But I care not telling thee, that I love her a thousand times more than Huntly's sickly sister, whom perhaps I may never see again."

"Very possibly; but, coek and pie! thou canst not mean to marry her?"

"Perhaps not, if she would sail with me on easier terms," said the libertine Earl in a low voice.

"Please yourself," said Ormiston, who had begun to tire of the conversation; "but remember your solemn plight to the Lady ane Gordon."

"A rare fellow thou to give good advice!"

"And that, if your solemn vow be broken, our doleful case would then be worse than ever. Ten thousand claymores would be unsheathed in Badenoch, Auchindoune, and Strathbolgie; we should have another northern rebellion to welcome our return."

"That would be merry and gay."

"Another Corriehie to fight, and——"

"What more?"

"A Bothwell to fall."

"Sayest thou? forgetting that, like thee, I am all but ruined, and the errand on which I came hither?"

"To league with that red-haired fox, Frederick of eeland, for

placing the northern isles in his possession, on condition that thou art viceroy thereof—a notable project!”

Bothwell coloured deeply as he replied—

“How ill my own plans sound when thus repeated to me! Yet I cannot but laugh when I imagine the expression the faces of Moray, Morton, and Lethington will assume, when those cold and calculating knaves, to whom we owe our present forfeiture and exile, hear of my Danish league. ’Twill be a master-stroke in the game of intrigue; and certes, under my circumstances, as Prince of Orkney and Shetland, holding the isles as a fief of Frederick, to wed the ward of this Norwegian knight were better than, as Bothwell, landless and penniless, to wed the untochered Jane of Huntly, and live like a trencherman or boy of the belt on the bounty of the proud earl, her brother.”

“Doubtless,” said Ormiston with an imperceptible sneer, “our vessel will require certain refitting, which will detain her here for some days?”

“Assuredly,” replied the Earl.

“During which time we must continue to fare on raw meat, sawdust, and sour ale, by the rood! Surely we will have plenty of time to canvass our projects to-morrow; but to-night let me sleep a-God’s name! for I am skinful of salt water, and well-nigh talked to death.”

Ormiston was soon fast asleep; and the Earl, though of a happy and thoughtless temperament, a reckless, and often (when crossed in his pride and purposes) of a ferocious disposition, envied his ease of mind.

He, too, courted sleep, but in vain; for a thousand fancies and a thousand fears intruded upon his mind. The changing expression of his fine features, when viewed by the fitful light of the expiring cresset, would have formed a noble study for a painter. One moment they were all fire and animation, as his heart expanded with hope and energy; the next saw them clouded by chagrin and bitterness, when he reflected on the more than princely patrimony he had ruined by a long career of private dissipation and political intrigue—for violence, turbulence, ambition, and reckless folly, had been the leading features in the life of this headstrong noble.

The career of Earl Bothwell had been one tissue of inconsistencies.

Revolted at the ecclesiastical executions which about the

period of James V's death so greatly disgusted the Scottish people, the Earl with his father became a reformer at an early period in life, and, like all the leaders in that great movement which was fated to convulse the land, accepted a secret pension from the English court to maintain his wild extravagance; but when blows were struck and banners displayed, when the army of the Protestants took the field against Mary of Guise, young Bothwell, in 1559, assumed the command of her French auxiliaries, and acted with vigour and valour in her cause.

Afterwards he went on an embassy to Paris; where, by the gallantry of his air, the splendour of his retinue, and the versatility of his talents for flattery, diplomacy, and intrigue, together with his dutiful and graceful demeanour, he particularly recommended himself to Mary of Scotland, the young queen of France.

Four years afterwards, when Mary was seated on her father's throne, he had returned to Scotland; but engaging in a desperate conspiracy for the destruction of his mortal foe, the Earl of Moray, then in the zenith of his power and royal favour, he had been indefinitely banished the court and kingdom. Filled with rage against Moray, who wielded the whole power at the court and council of his too facile sister, Bothwell, finding his star thus completely eclipsed by a rival to whom he was fully equal in bravery and ambition, though inferior in subtlety and guile, and that his strong and stately castles, his fertile provinces and rich domains, were gifted away to feudal and political foemen, sought the Danish court, where he had intrigued so far that at the period when our story opens a conspiracy had been formed to place all the fortresses of Orkney and Shetland in the hands of Frederick, who, in return, was to create Lord Bothwell Prince of the Northern Isles. This plot had gradually been developing; and the Earl, in furtherance of his daring and revengeful scheme, was now on his way back to Orkney, where he possessed various fiefs and adherents, especially one powerful baron of the house of Balfour of Monkquhanny.

To a face and form that were singularly noble and prepossessing, the unfortunate Earl of Bothwell united a bearing alike gallant and courtly; while his known courage and suavity of manner, in the noonday of his fortune, made him the favourite equally of the great and the humble.

Without being yet a confirmed profligate, he had plunged deeply into all the excesses and gaieties of the age, especially

when in France and Italy ; for at home in Scotland, when under the Draconian laws and iron rule of the new *regime*, the arena of such follies, even to a powerful baron, was very circumscribed.

His heart was naturally good, and his first impulses were ever those of warmth, generosity, and gratitude ; and these principles, under proper direction, when united to his talent, courage, and ambition, might have made him an ornament to his country. His early rectitude of purpose had led him to trust others too indiscriminately ; his warmth, to sudden attachments and dangerous quarrels ; his generosity, to lavish extravagance. Early in life he is said to have loved deeply and unhappily, but with all the ardour of which a first passion is capable of firing a brave and generous heart. Who the object of his love had been was then unknown ; one report averred her to be a French princess, and the Magister Absalom Beyer shrewdly guesses, that this means no other than the dauphiness, Mary Stuart—but of this more anon.

There was now a dash of the cynic in his nature, and he was fast schooling himself to consider women merely what he was in his gayer moments, habitually averring them to be the mere instruments of pleasure, and tools of ambition.

The unhappy influence of that ill-placed or unrequited love, had thrown a long shadow on the career of Bothwell ; and as the sun of his fortune set, that shadow grew darker and deeper. But there were times, when his cooler reflection had tamed his wild impulses, that a sudden act of generosity and chivalry would evince the greatness of that heart, which an unhappy combination of circumstances, a prospect the most alluring that ever opened to man, and the influence of evil counsel spurring on a restless ambition, hurried into those dark and terrible schemes of power and greatness that blighted his name and fame for ever !

The character of his friend and brother exile, Hob Ormiston of that Ilk, had been distinguished only for its pride, ferocity, turbulence, and rapacity. He was one of the worst examples of those brutal barons who flourished on the ruins of the Church of Rome—the only power that ever held them in check—who laughed to scorn the laws of God and man—who recognised no will save their own, and no law but that of the sword and the strongest hand—who quoted Scripture to rifle and overthrow the same church which their fathers had quoted Scripture to erect and endow ; and who, in that really dark age succeeding

the Scottish Reformation, embroiled their helpless and gentle sovereign in a disastrous civil war, and drenched their native land in blood!

CHAPTER VI.

ANNA.

THE light of the rising sun was streaming through the windows next morning when the Earl awoke; and, from dreams of a stormy sea, with the din of flapping canvas and rattling cordage in his ears, was agreeably surprised by finding close to his the small fair face and bright eyes of Anna Rosenkrantz—so close, indeed, that her soft hair mingled with his own, and the breath of her prying little mouth came gently on his cheek,

Like the sweet south, that breathes upon a bank of violets.

It was suddenly withdrawn, and Bothwell started up.

The young lady, with Christina, her attendant, arrayed in neat morning dresses, the black fur of which contrasted with the snowy whiteness of their necks and arms, stood by his bedside with a warm posset of spiced ale, according to that ancient custom, still retained in Norway, where now a dish of warm coffee is substituted for the mulled mead of their jovial ancestors, and is presented by the ladies of the house to each guest and inmate about daybreak.

In pursuance of this primitive custom, Lady Anna presented herself by the couch of the Earl, whose dark eyes sparkled with astonishment and pleasure; for various episodes of love and intrigue flashed upon his mind, when beholding the object of his admiration standing in that half dishabille at so early an hour, and a deep blush of confusion suffused the face of the beautiful girl, for the aspect of the Earl was singularly prepossessing.

His black locks curled shortly over a pale and noble forehead; his eyes were intensely dark, and the hue of his thick moustaches and short peaked beard formed a strong contrast to the whiteness of his half bare chest, which was pale as the marble of Paros.

"A good morning, my Lord!" said Anna with a delightful smile, while Christina addressed herself to Ormiston; "I hope your dreams have been pleasant!"

"They were of thee, fair Anna—"

"Then they must have been delightful," she replied with gaiety, eluding the Earl, who endeavoured to possess her hand. "And you have slept well?"

"On this downy couch I could not have reposed otherwise than well, lady."

"I am glad you appreciate what is all the work of my own fair hands; for know, sir, that this quilt of eider-down was the last essay of my perseverance and industry."

"Thine, fair Anna!"

"Thou seest I am not one to hide my candle under a bushel."

"By the wheel of St. Catherine!" said the Earl, smiling as he smoothed down the quilt, which was entirely made of soft feathers from the breast of the eider-duck, woven into bright and beautiful patterns; there is something very adorable in the idea of reposing under what your pretty fingers have wrought!"

"Konrad scaled the highest cliffs that overhang the fiord to bring me these feathers. Poor Konrad! He has clambered for me, where not even Jans Thorson or the boldest man on the bay would dare to climb, even to win his daily bread."

"And who is this Konrad?" asked Bothwell, suspiciously.

"He who—permit me to say—saved you from the ocean last night; and, but for whom, perhaps, you had now been in heaven."

"St. Mary forefend it had not been a warmer place!"

"I have brought you our morning grace-cup," said Anna, placing it in his hand; "drink to the prosperity of the lords of Welsöö, my lord, and let me begone, for I have my uncle, Sir Erick, and others, to visit with the same gift."

The Earl promptly kissed her hand, and emptied the cup, thus displaying the difference between his open nature and that of Ormiston, who, being ever on the alert against treachery and surprise, declined tasting the ale, until, as a compliment, Christina Slingbunder first put it to her rosy lips, after which he drained the goblet at one gulp; and, clasping the buxom damsel in his arms, imprinted a kiss upon each of her cheeks, for which she roundly boxed his ears; and, when the ladies had withdrawn, both he and the Earl lay back in their beds, bursting with laughter, for Ormiston exercised his wit in various jests on this unusual visit—jestes which the modest Magister Absalom Beyer has failed or declined to record.

To his great satisfaction, the Earl found that his vessel, the *Fleur-de-Lys*, a stout little brigantine, had been so much shat-

tered by the late storm, that, by the solemnly delivered verdict of David Wood his Skipper, Hans Knuber, and other seafaring men of Bergen, the work of several days would be required to refit her for sea; and these days, with the recklessness of his nature, he resolved to devote entirely to the prosecution of an amour, the end of which he could not entirely foresee.

Though solemnly betrothed to Lady Jane Gordon, second daughter of George, Earl of Huntly, who had been slain at the battle of Corrichie, the love he once felt and avowed for her, had evaporated during his wandering life, and long absence from Scotland; and, as it happened that the heart of the amorous Earl abhorred a vacuum, he gave way to all the impulses of this new passion, which the beauty and winning manner of Anna were so well calculated to inspire and confirm, and which he thought would prove a pleasing variety and amusement in his exile. A month had elapsed since they separated at Copenhagen, and that short separation had served but to increase the flame which a longer one would as surely have extinguished.

The morning meal was over; the castle hall had been converted into a court of justice, where, seated in his red leather chair, with his orders on his breast, Erick Rosenkrantz heard pleas and quarrels, and gave those decisions which constituted him the Solon of Aggerhuis and Lycurgus of Bergen. The Earl had returned from the beach, where the entire population of the little town had crowded to witness the unusual sight of hauling his vessel into a rude dock, constructed in a creak of the rocks, where Hans Knuber and all the fishermen on the fiord had been lounging since daybreak, with their hands stuffed into the pockets of their voluminous red breeches, criticising with seamanlike eyes, and commenting in most nautical Norse, on the rig, mould, and aspect of the Scottish ship.

As Bothwell, with his white plume dancing above his lofty head, the embroidery of his mantle, and the brilliants of his belt and bonnet sparkling in the sunshine, ascended to a terrace of the castle that overlooked the fiord, the notes of a harp struck with great skill, mingling with the voice of Anna, fell upon his ear, and he paused.

She was singing an old Scandinavian air, which, being chiefly remarkable for its melody and simplicity, was admirably adapted to her soft, low voice. Nothing could surpass the

grace of her figure, as she bent forward over the rudely formed but classic instrument, her face half shaded by her glossy hair, that fell in profusion from under the little velvet cap before mentioned, and glittered in the sunshine, like the wiry strings among which her small white hands were moving so swiftly.

The grass of the terrace was smooth as velvet, and permitted the Earl to approach so softly, that not even his gold spurs were heard to jangle as he walked. Though Anna appeared not to perceive him, she was perfectly aware of his approach. Conscious of her skill as a musician, and of her own beauty, which she had that day taken every precaution and care to enhance, and animated by a coquettish desire to please one whom she well knew to be her lover, she continued to sing unheedingly, and the Earl was thus permitted to approach (as he thought, unobserved) until he leant over the parapet close beside her. He felt his heart stirred by the pathos of her voice; for, animated by an intense desire to please and to conquer, she sang exquisitely an old song, with which, in her childhood, she had heard the wandering Lapps welcome the approach of summer.

I.

"The snows are dissolving
On Tornao's rude side;
And the ice of Lulhea
Flows down its dark tide.
Thy stream, O Lulhea!
Flows freely away;
And the snowdrop unfolds
Its pale leaves to the day.

II.

Far off thy keen terrors,
O winter! retire;
And the north's dancing streamer
Relinquish their fire.
The sun's warm rays
Swell the buds on the tree;
And Enna chants forth
Her wild warblings with glee.

III.

Our reindeer unharness'd
In freedom shall play,
And safely by Odin's
Steep precipice stray.

The wolf to the forest's
 Recesses shall fly,
 And howl to the moon
 As she glides through the sky.

IV.

Then haste, my fair Luah—"

She paused, and gradually a blush deepened on her cheek, for, with all her graceful coquetry and gaiety, there was at times a dash of charming timidity in her manner; so, suddenly becoming abashed, she raised her mild eyes to those of the Earl, and immediately cast them down again, for his cheek had flushed in turn, increasing the manly beauty of his dark features, which the shadow of his blue velvet bonnet, and the graceful droop of his white ostrich feather, enhanced; and she knew that his eyes were beaming upon her with the sentiment her performance and her presence had inspired.

She had read it all in his burning glance, and at the moment she cast down her eyes, a new sensation of joy and triumph filled her heart. The experienced Earl was aware that the fair citadel was tottering to its fall.

"Gentle Anna," said he, in his softest and most dulcet French, "for my unseasonable interruption I crave pardon, and beg that you will continue, for every chord of my heart is stirred when you sing."

"There is but one verse more," replied Anna, as she bent her head with a graceful inclination, and, shaking back her long fair tresses, continued—

IV.

Then haste, my fair Luah,
 Oh haste to the grove;
 To pass the sweet season
 Of summer in love.
 In youth let our bosoms
 With ecstasy glow;
 For the winter of life
 Ne'er a transport can know."

"Sadly true it is, fair Anna," said the amorous Earl, as he leaned against the gothic parapet, and very nonchalantly played with his fingers among her snowy ringlets; "youth is indeed the only season for love and joy, for due susceptibility of the blooming and the beautiful."

"And for futile wishes and dreamy fancies," replied the young lady with a sad smile.

"Dost thou moralise?" laughed the Earl; "why, gentle one, I, who am ten years thy senior, have never once dreamt of morality yet—moralising, I would say—ha! ha! that will suit when my years number sixty or so, if some unlucky lance or sword-thrust does not, ere that time, spoil me for being a doting old monk; for, as the white-haired Earl Douglas said, when he in old age assumed the cowl, 'One who may no better be, must be a monk.' (By the mass, I would make a rare friar!) To me there is something very droll in hearing a pretty woman moralise. And so thou considerest youth the season for dreams and fancies?"

"Oh, yes! for now I am ever full of them."

"'Tis well," replied Bothwell, glancing at the rugged castle and its still more rugged scenery; "for there are times when the realities of life are not very pleasant. But hath not old age its fancies too, and its dreams?"

"True, my lord, but dreams of the past."

"Nay, of the present. Faith! I remember me when I was but a boy at Paris, old Anne, Madame la Duchesse d'Estampes, who might have been my grandmother, fell in love with my slender limbs and beardless chin, and well-nigh brought me to death's door with her villanous love-philtres. From those days upward, my own mind has been full of its fancies, fair Anna, and I have had my day-dreams of power and ambition, of love and grandeur, and wakened but to find them dreams indeed!"

"Those of love, too," murmured Anna.

"Yes, yes," said the Earl, whose face was crossed by a sudden shade, which Anna's anxious eye soon perceived; "why should I conceal that, like other boys, I have had my visions of that land of light and roses—visions that faded away, even as the sunlight is now fading on yonder mountain-tops; and the hour came when I wondered how such wild hopes had ever been cherished—how such dreams had ever dawned; and I could look back upon my boyish folly with a smile of mingled sadness and of scorn."

"'Tis a bitter reflection, that a time may come when one may marvel that one ever loved, my lord."

"And hoped and feared, and made one's self alternately the victim of misery or of joy—raised to heaven by one glance, and

sunk into despair by another. Yet, dear as a first love is while it lasts—at least, so say minstrel and romancer—there are thousands who live to thank Heaven that they were not wedded to that first loved one.”

“Dost thou really think so?” colouring with something of pique at the tenor of this conversation, which made her think of Konrad.

“The experience of my friends in a thousand instances hath taught me so,” said the politic Earl, who began to feel that the topic was unfortunately chosen; “but,” he added adroitly, as, sinking his voice, he took her hand in his, “dear Anna, never will the day come when I shall thank Heaven that I was not wedded to *thee*.”

Again the quick blush rushed to Anna’s neck and temples; she bent over her harp, and said in a low but laughing voice—

“Fie! Lord Bothwell, surely I am not your first love?”

“Thou art, indeed, dear Anna!”

“Go, go! I will never believe it!”

“My first, my last, my only one!” said the Earl, encircling her gently with his arms, and pressing her forehead against his cheek; and, though this assertion was not strictly true, in the ardour of the moment he almost believed it so. “Until the moment we parted at Frederick’s palace gate—parted, as I thought, to meet no more—I knew not how deep was my unavowed love for thee. Hear me, Anna, dear Anna! I love thee with my heart of hearts—my whole soul! My name, my coronet, all I possess, are at thy feet; say, dear one, canst thou love me?”

Borne away by the ardour of his passion, he brought out this avowal, all at a breath—“for,” sayeth the Magister Absalom, “he had repeated it, on similar occasions, twenty times”—and, pressing her to his heart, slipped upon her finger a very valuable ring.

“Canst thou love me, Anna,” he continued in a broken voice, “as I love thee—as my bride, my wife? and——” Anna replied an inaudible something, as she hung, half-fainting with confusion, on his breast.

Bothwell had almost paused as he spoke, half-scared by his own impetuosity, and feeling, even in that moment of transport, a pang, as the thoughts of ambition and the world arose before him.

And the ring!

By the false Earl, the fond giver of that little emblem of love was forgotten. On the inside was engraved—

*“The gift and the giver
Are thine for ever.”*

It was the pledge of betrothal from Jane Gordon of Huntly, and now it sparkled on the hand of her rival!

“As this circlet is without end, so without end will be my love for thee, Anna!” said the impassioned noble, forgetting that with these very words, for that ring he had given another before the prelate of Dunblane. Anna trembled violently; she felt his heart beating against her own, and a new, rapid, and consuming sensation thrilled like lightning through every vein and fibre. She became giddy, faint; and, like a rose surcharged with dew, reclined her head upon the shoulder of the handsome Earl.

“And thou art mine, Anna—mine, for ever!”

“Oh, yes—for ever!” she whispered; and passionately and repeatedly Bothwell’s dark and well-moustached mouth was pressed on her dewy lip.

Footsteps approached!

He started, and hurriedly led her to a seat, placed her harp close by, raised her hands to his lips with an air in which love and tenderness were exquisitely blended with courtesy and respect, and then hurried away.

Overcome, and trembling with the excitement of this brief interview, Anna bent with closed eyes over her harp for a moment; but, becoming suddenly aware that some one stood near her, she started, and the pallor of death and guilt overspread her flushed face when her eyes met those of—Konrad.

CHAPTER VII.

KONRAD.

KONRAD’S dark blue eyes were regarding her with a peculiar expression, such as she had never before seen them wear. There was an intense sadness in it, mingled with pity and scorn. It was searching and reproachful, too; and, though Anna felt all that single glance conveyed, she never quailed beneath it;

but the blood came and went in her changing cheek as she surveyed her indignant lover.

The appearance and bearing of young Konrad were very prepossessing.

During the whole of that day he had been out hunting, and was now returned laden with the spoil of forest and fiord. A doublet of white cloth, trimmed with black fur, slashed with scarlet sareenet at the breast and sleeves, and adorned with a profusion of silver knobs, fitted tightly to his handsome figure; his trunk hose were fashioned of the same materials, and he wore rough leather boots, and a smart velvet cap adorned by an eagle-feather, under which his long hair descended in fair locks upon his shoulders. He was equipped with a crossbow, hunting-knife, and bugle-horn, and a sheaf of short arrows bristled in his baldrick. An immense cock-of-the-wood and a bag of golden plover were slung over one shoulder, balanced on the other by a pouch of sea-birds' eggs, taken from their eyries in those impending cliffs that overhang the bay, where, clinging as a fly clings to a wall, he had scrambled and swung fearlessly above the surf; and, chief spoil of the day, he bore upon his shoulder a black fox, which he had slain by a single bolt from his crossbow.

His natural colour had been increased by exercise; and he looked so handsome and gallant as he sprang up the terrace-steps with his unwound arblast in his hand, that Christina Slingbunder sighed as he kissed her dimpled hand a moment before, when enquiring for her mistress; but now the mind of that fickle mistress was too full of Bothwell's image to think much, if at all, on her former lover.

Unwilling to admit to her those bitter suspicions and jealousies that were harrowing up his heart, Konrad addressed her as usual, and with an air of affected gaiety, laid the spoil of his bow and spear at her feet. She bowed in silence, and regarded them dreamily.

"See how beautiful is the fur of this fox! Will not its blackness contrast well with your snowy skin, dear Anna?"

"Tush!" said she, a little pettishly; "flatter not thyself, good Konrad, I will make me trimmings of an odious fox-skin; away with it!"

Konrad was piqued by this unusual reply, but he still continued—

"Then behold this great woodcock; see how broad, ow dark and beautiful are its pinions!"

"Truly, good Konrad, thou teazest me," replied Anna, stroking them with her white hands, but thinking the while how much its plumage resembled Bothwell's black locks.

"And where thinkest thou I winged him, Anna, with a single bolt from my arblast?"

"I know not," she replied vacantly.

"Thou wilt never guess," continued Konrad, resuming something of his tender and playful manner, despite the palsy in his heart. "In the Wood Demon's *oak*."

"Then this bird may cost thee dear, for the demon will avenge it some day!"

"Already he is avenged!" said Konrad, with sudden bitterness.

Anna smiled, for she knew his meaning well.

"Oh, Anna!" said the young man, laying his hand earnestly on hers; "how changed thou art! what have I done to offend thee?"

"Nothing!"

"Then by some accursed magic this ring hath bewitched thee!"

"Ring!" she reiterated, changing colour.

Konrad dashed his crossbow on the earth.

"And is it so?" he exclaimed; "e Anna! Anna! like ernebok, the spirit of darkness and of vil, this Scottish Earl hath crossed my path. I saw him salute thy cheek again and again, yet thou didst not reprove him. Even wert thou to love me again as of old, the charm would be broken; and O my God! there is nothing left me but to wish we had never met!"

Anna leaned upon the parapet, and averted her face a little. The accents of Konrad's voice — that voice she had once loved so well — sank deep in her heart; but Bothwell's kiss still glowed upon her cheek, and her heart was steeled against remorse.

"Anna," continued her lover, in a tone of sadness, "so completely was my life identified with thine, that we seemed to have but one being — one existence: the love of thee was a part of myself. I have often thought if thou wert to die, I could never live without thee; but I have lost thee now by a separation

more bitter than death. Thou knowest, Anna Rosenkrantz, how long, how well I loved thee, ere thou went to Frederick's court; and in truth I had many a bitter doubt if, at thy return, I would find thee the same artless and confiding girl that left me."

"And when I *did* return?" asked Anna, with a smile.

"Thou hadst forgotten to love me," replied Konrad, clasping his hands.

"'Tis the way of the world," laughed Anna.

"The cruel and selfish world only."

"Be it so."

"Then thou lovest me no more?"

Anna played for a moment with the fringe of her stomacher, and then replied "*No!*"

The young man turned away with an unsteady step, and pressed his hand upon his forehead, as if he would crush some overpowering emotion. Anna lifted her little harp, and was about to retire. Konrad took her hand, but she abruptly withdrew it; a pang shot through his heart, and something of remorse ran through her own at the unkindness of the action.

He caught her skirt, and besought her to listen to him for the last time.

"Anna, dearest Anna!" he said in a breathless voice; "oh, never was there a love more pure or more devoted than mine! Long, long ago, I endeavoured to crush this passion as it grew in my breast, for I knew the gulf that lay between us — thou, the daughter of Svend of Bergenhus, the wealthy and ennobled merchant, famous alike for his treasures and his conquests over the Burghers of Lubeck and the Dukes of Holstein — I, the representative of a race that have decayed and fallen with the pride of old Norway, even as their old dwelling on yonder hill," and he pointed to the ruined tower on the distant Saltzberg; "even as it has fallen almost to its foundations. As these convictions came home to my heart, I strove to crush the expanding flower — to shun thee — to avoid thy presence, as thou mayest remember; but still thine image came ever before me with all its witchery, and a thousand chances threw us ever together. Ah! why wert thou so affable, so winning, when, knowing the secret that preyed on my heart, thou mightest so much more kindly have repulsed me? why encourage me to hope — to love — when thou wert to treat me thus?"

"Enough of this," faltered Anna; "permit me to pass—I can hear no more."

"How cruel—how cold—how calculating! It is very wicked to trifle thus with the best affections of a poor human heart. O Anna! in all the time I have loved you so truly and so well, it was long ere I had even the courage to kiss your hand."

"Because thou wert ever so timid," said Anna with a half smile.

"Timid only because my love was a deep and a sincere one. But what were my sensations," and he grasped his dagger as he spoke; "what agony I endured, on seeing this accursed stranger kiss your cheek!"

Anna's colour deepened, and again she endeavoured to retire.

"Oh, tarry one moment, Anna!" continued the poor lover in a touching voice, and kneeling down, while his eyes filled alternately with the languor of love and the fire of anger. "In memory of those pleasant hours that are gone for ever, permit me once again to kiss this hand—and never more will I address you. Refuse me not, Anna!"

"Thou tirest me!" she replied, stretching out her hand, but averting her face; for the beautiful coquette had "a smile on her lip and a tear in her eye"—a smile, for she could not repress her triumph in exciting so much love—and a tear, for she could not stifle her pity.

Konrad kissed her hand with the utmost tenderness. It lingered a moment in his, but was suddenly withdrawn. The light left his eyes; a curtain seemed to have fallen between him and the world—and he was alone.

On the terrace which had been the scene of this sad interview, he lingered long, with his heart crushed beneath a load of conflicting emotions. The love he had so long borne Anna now began to struggle with emotions of wounded self-esteem and anger at her cold desertion. Jealousy prompted him to seek some deadly vengeance, and from time to time he cast furtive glances at his steel arblast, with its sheaf of winged bolts, that lay among the spoil he had brought from the forest. Had the Earl of Bothwell appeared within bowshot while these evil thoughts floated through the brain of Konrad, our history had ended, perhaps, with the present chapter; but, luckily, he was at that moment engaged at the old game of Troy with Sir Erick in the hall.

"I could not slay him!" thought the young man, generously, as other emotions rose within him; "no, not even if he smote me with his clenched hand. She seems to love him so much, that his death would be alike a source of misery to her and deep remorse to me. Dear Anna! thy happiness will still be as much my aim as if I had wedded thee; but I pray God thou mayest not be deceived, and endure—what I am now enduring!"

These generous thoughts soothed not his agony; and bitter was the sense of loneliness, of misery, and desolation, that closed over his heart in unison with the shadows of evening that were then setting over the wide landscape below.

"And she coldly saw me weep!" he exclaimed.

He felt that he must leave Bergen and the presence of Anna—but for whence? Whether for the desolate settlements of the half-barbarian Lapps, or the wars of the Lubeckers and Holsteiners, he could not decide. His love of the chase inclined him to the first; his weariness of life, to the last.

Such were his thoughts; but at two-and-twenty one seldom tires of existence, whatever its disappointments and bitterness may have been.

The sun had set on the distant sea, and the long line of saffron light it shed across the dark blue water died away; the gloomy shadows of the rocks and keep of Bergen faded from the bosom of the harbour, and red lights began to twinkle one by one, in the little windows of the wooden fisher-huts, that nestled on the shelving rocks far down below, among a wilderness of nets, and boats, and anchors.

From the terrace of the castle, miles beyond miles of rocky mountains were seen stretching afar off in blue perspective towards the surf-beaten Isles of Lofoden; and, tipped by the last red light of the sun that had set, their splintered and rifted peaks shot up in fantastic cones from those endless forests, so deep, and dark, and solemn—so voiceless and so still. Konrad's melancholy meditations were uninterrupted by a sound; no living thing seemed near, save a red-eyed hawk that sat on a fragment of rock.

He could hear his own heart beating.

Though his mind was a prey to bitterness the most intense, he watched the sunset, and the changing features of the landscape, with all the attention that trifles often receive, even in moments of the deepest anguish.

Gradually the shadows crept upward from the low places to the mountain-tops. Each long promontory that jutted into the far perspective of the narrow fiord, was a steep mountain that towered from its glassy bosom in waveworn precipices; between these lay the smaller inlets, long and narrow valleys full of deep and dark blue water, that reflected the solemn pines by day, and the diamond stars by night. Some were dark and sunless, but others glittered still in purple, gold, and green, where the eider-duck floated in the last light of the west; and all was still as death along the margin of that beautiful bay, save the roar of a distant cataract, where a river poured over the chasmed rock, and sought the ocean in a column of foam.

Night drew on; the bleating of the home-driven kids, the flap of the owlet's wing, and faint howl of a wandering wolf, broke the stillness of the balmy northern eve; while the wiry foliage of the vast pine-forests, that flourished almost to the castle gates, vibrated in the rising wind, and seemed to fill the dewy air with the hum of a thousand fairy harps.

Konrad, who, with his face buried in his hands, had long reclined against the rampart of the terrace, was startled to find close beside him a tall dark man, whose proportions, when looming in the twilight, seemed almost herculean, intently examining the great wood-cock, in the bosom of which a cross-bow bolt was firmly barbed.

Filled with that inborn superstition which is still common to all Scandinavia, his first thought was of the terrible *Wood Demon*, in whose venerated oak he had so heedlessly and daringly shot the bird. Animated by terror, such as he had never known before, a prickly sensation spread over his whole frame, and even Anna was partially forgotten in the sudden horror that thrilled through him, as, with an invocation to God, he sprang upon the battlement of the terrace.

The dark stranger uttered a shout, and sprang forward. Konrad's terror was completed.

He toppled over, made one palsied and fruitless effort to clutch the grass that grew in the clefts of the ancient wall, and failing, launched out into the air; down, down, he went, disappearing headlong into that dark abyss, at the bottom of which rolled the ocean.

"Cock and pie!" muttered Black Hob, with astonishment, (for it was no other than he,) as he peered over the rampart,

“was it a madman or a bogle that vanished over the wall like the blink of a sunbeam?”

He stretched over, cast down one hasty glance, and instinctively drew back; for far down at the base of the beetling crags, he saw the ocean boiling, white and frothy, through the obscurity below.

A wild and unearthly cry ascended to his ear.

“By the blessed mass, a water-kelpie!” muttered Ormiston, as he hurried away in great disorder.

Konrad escaped a death on the rocks, but, falling into the ocean, arose to the surface at some distance from the shore. Breathless and faint by his descent from such a height, he could scarcely (though an excellent swimmer) make one stroke to save his life. A strong current running seaward round the promontory, drove a piece of drift-wood—a pine log—past him. He clutched it with all the despair of the drowning, and, twining himself among its branches, was thus swiftly, by the currents of the fiord, borne out into the wide waste of the Skager Rack.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE COCK-OF-THE-WOODS.

IN Norway there existed (and exists even unto this day) a certain maleficent spirit, who is ever on the alert to poke a finger in everybody's affairs, and to put everything wrong that ought to be right. He hides whatever is missing, and brings about every mischance that happens to man, woman, or child—to horse and to dog—to the huntsman in the woods—to the fisher on the fiord. The blame of every ill is laid on the shoulders of this unfortunate and omnipresent sprite—NIPPEN; who, though secretly blamed, cursed, and feared, must outwardly be spoken of with reverence and respect, or his unremitting vengeance and malevolence are certain and sure.

Always after nightfall, to obtain his good-will, a can of spiced ale is deposited in a certain nook of every household for the especial behoof of the thirsty imp; who, if he cannot find time to empty all the cans so liberally bestowed, generally permits

some of the wandering Lapps, the houseless dogs or questing foxes, that are ever wandering after nightfall, to have that pleasure; so that next morning Nippen's ale-can is usually found empty in its place.

In the castle of Bergen it was the morning occupation of Anna to spice a eup of ale until it was exquisitely flavoured, and then, in accordance with the still existing superstition, Christina Slingbunder placed it in a solitary nook of the terrace, for the prowling spirit of mischief, who nightly found it there; but Sueno Thronndson frequently and somewhat suspiciously averred, that Nippen came in the shape of a Danish crossbowman to drink it.

On the evening mentioned in the preceding chapter, Ormiston, chancing to pass that way, observed the bright flagon standing in its sequestered niche, and drew it forth. He surveyed it with great interest in various ways—and then tasted it. The flavour was delicious, and he drained it to the bottom.

The spiced liquor mounting at once to the brain of Hob, threw a sudden cloud over all his faculties, which were never very bright at any time; and thus next morning he had no remembrance of his adventure with Konrad on the terrace on the preceding evening.

At the same hour, however, he failed not to examine the same place; and finding there another mug of that divinely-flavoured beverage, without hesitation transferred the contents to his stomach, much to the disappointment of a certain Danish soldier, who, finding himself anticipated a second and third time, began with some terror to imagine that Nippen was at last beginning to look after his property in person.

The fumes mounted to the Knight of Ormiston's brain; and carolling the merry old ditty of "The Frog that came to the Mill Door," he danced round the terrace, kicking before him the cock-of-the-woods, that was still lying where Konrad had left it. As he was about to descend, Bothwell, gaily attired, with his eyes and countenance radiant with pleasure, sprang up the stair, taking three steps at a time.

"Good-morrow, noble Bothwell!" said Ormiston, balancing himself on each leg alternately.

"What the devil art thou following now, eh!" asked the Earl.

"My nose, for lack of something better!"

"Thou seemest very drunk! Surely the ale at dinner to-day was not over strong for thee. But, harkee, I have triumphed!"

"Indeed! but the fact is, I am too drunk at the present moment to see exactly how!"

"Guzzler! thou understandest me very well!"

"A notable triumph for one who, if rumour sayeth true, broke many a seonee and many a spear at the Tournelles for the love of a French princess!"

Bothwell coloured deeply; a dark frown gathered on his broad brow, and his dark, expressive eyes filled with light; but the expression and the momentary emotion passed away together.

"I value thy gibes not a rush. To me all the world is now concentrated in this rude Norwegian castle!"

"What a difference between a man who is in love like thee, and one who is *not*, like me!"

"My stout Hob, thou knowest more of foraying by Cheviot-side, and harrying the beeves of Westmoreland, than of making love!"

"Heaven be praised! for I have known this same love turn many a bearded man into a puling boy."

"It can exalt the heart of a coward into that of a hero. It can expand the bosom of the austere hermit into that of a jovial toper—"

"And endow Bothwell, the hellicate rake, with all the virtues of Bothan, the saint and confessor."

"I wish all the imps in hell had thee!" said the Earl, turning away.

"I thank thee for thy good wishes," replied his friend, reeling a little. "And so thou hast really and irrevocably given thy heart to this grey-eyed Norwegian."

"Grey-eyed, thou blind mole! Her eyes are of the brightest and purest blue."

"I say *grey*, by all the furies! and I protest that I love neither grey eyes nor the name of Anna."

"Wherefore, most sapient Hob?"

"Because I never knew an Anne that was not cold-hearted, or a grey-eyed woman that was not cunning as a red tod."

"Marry! a proper squire to judge of beauty," said the Earl laughing, but, nevertheless, feeling very much provoked. "But thou wilt know how to shape thy discourse, when I say that I am about to ask her hand of Erick Rosenkrantz."

“By St. Christopher the giant, thou art mad!” said Ormiston, with a gravity that showed the assertion had sobered him; “be wary, be prudent. Should the Lord Huntly—”

“My malediction on Huntly! He shall never see my face again; so it matters not. He may bestow his pale sister, the Lady Jane, on some ruffling minion of the bastard Moray, the crafty Morton, the craftier Maitland, or of the thundering Knox, who now have all the sway in that Court where the outlawed Bothwell shall never more be seen.” And with one hand twisting his moustaches and the other playing with the pommel of his dagger the Earl strode away, and left his friend and vassal to his own confused reflections.

Bothwell, who had ever been the creature of impulse, without delay sought old Sir Erick of Welsöo, whom he found seated in a nook of the ramparts, basking in the long lingering sunshine, and sheltered from the evening wind by the angle of the turret. His long sword rested against one arm of his chair, a pewter mug of dricka was placed on the other, and before him stood Sueno, cap in hand, receiving certain orders with all due reverence.

“What the devil is this Van Dribbel tells me?” he was saying as Bothwell approached. “All the beer soured by the thunder-storm! I marvel that it hath not soured my temper too, for there never was a man so crossed, I tell thee, Sueno. It was my wish that Konrad should have undertaken the capture of this necromancer, and seen him hanged in one of his own devilish cords; and now Konrad is nowhere to be found. How dares he leave the preeincts of Bergen without my permission?”

“His Danish archers have searched everywhere,” said Sueno, “even to the base of the Silverbergen, sounding their horns through the forest, along the shores of the fiord, and the margin of the bay; and I would venture my better hand to a boar’s claw that the Captain Konrad is not within the province of Aggerhuis.”

“Sayest thou so!” exclaimed the Knight Rosenkrantz, who, between the attention required by his offices of castellan and governor—the machinations of a water-sprite who dwelt in the harbour of Bergen, where he daily wrought all manner of evil to the fishermen, Nippen, who made himself so busy in the affairs of all honest people on the land, the gnomes of the Silver-

bergen, who stole his poultry, and the cantrips of a certain mischievous demon inhabiting the adjacent wood, and had thrice turned three fair flocks of Sir Erick's sheep into field-mice, in which shape he had seen them vanishing into mole-tracks in the turf where a moment before they had been browsing—the old governor, we say, who, with all these things to divert his attention, never found time hang heavy on his hands, made a gesture of anger and impatience, and he swore a Norse oath, which the Magister Absalom Beyer has written so hurriedly that our powers of translation fail us; but he added—

“My mind misgiveth me that something is wrong. Away, Sueno, take a band of archers, and once more beat the woods with shout and bugle; and if Konrad appears not by sunrise to-morrow, by the holy Hansdag, I will—not know what to think.”

The threat evaporated; for honest Rosenkrantz loved the youth as if he had been his own son.

Though Bothwell had a grace, effrontery, or assurance (which you will), that usually carried him well through almost everything he undertook, and which won everyone to his purpose, he could not have chosen a more unfortunate crisis for the startling proposal, which he made with admirable deliberation and nonchalance to the portly Rosenkrantz, who no sooner heard the conclusion than he said with a hauteur, to which Bothwell, at all times proud and fiery, was totally unaccustomed, and which he did not think this plain, unvarnished Nordlander could assume—

“Excuse me, I pray thee, my Lord Earl of Bothwell. Though I venerate your rank and mission as ambassador from the Queen of Scots (here the Earl's cheek glowed crimson), I cannot give my niece to you, even were I willing to bestow her. She is the first and only love of my young friend, Konrad of Saltzberg, as gallant a heart as Norway owns; he to whose daring you and your friends owed preservation on the night of the storm. From childhood they have known and loved each other, yea, since they were no higher than *that*,” holding his hand about six inches from the ground; “growing up, as it were, like two little birds in the same nest, twining into each other like two tendrils from the same tree; and a foul stain it would be on me to part them now, even though King Frederick came in person to sue for the hand of Anna.”

"Hear me, Lord Erick," began Bothwell, alike astonished and offended at the rejection of a suit which he secretly thought was somewhat degrading to himself.

"I know all thou wouldst urge," said Erick, shaking his hand; "but this may not, cannot be; for thou art a man too gay and gallant to mate with one of our timid Norwegian maidens."

The inexplicable smile that spread over the Earl's face showed there was more in his mind than the honest Norseman could read. He was about to speak, when Sueno approached, bearing in his hand a dead bird, and having great alarm powerfully depicted in his usually unmeaning face.

"Oh, Sir Erick, Sir Erick! what think you? Last night Konrad of Saltzberg shot this cock in the Wood Demon's oak!"

"Now, heaven forefend!" exclaimed the Castellan, sinking back in grief and alarm. "Then, Sueno, thou needst search no more. God save thee, poor Konrad!"

"How—how, wherefore?" asked Bothwell; "what has happened?"

"We shall never behold him more. He hath assuredly been spirited away," replied Rosenkrantz in great tribulation; for in the existence of all those elementary beings incident to Norse superstition, he believed devoutly as in the gospel; "he hath been spirited away, and enclosed—Heaven alone knoweth where—perhaps in a rock or tree close beside us here—perhaps in an iceberg at the pole—"

"Amen!" thought Bothwell, who would have laughed had he dared; "I would that the Captain of Bergen were keeping him company!"

"O Sueno! thou rememberest how it fared with thy brother Rolf, when he stole acorns from that very tree?"

"Yes—yes—as he crossed the Fiord in the moonlight, a great hand arose from the water, and drew down his boat to the bottom—and so he perished. Poor Rolf!"

"And with the father of Hans Knuber, who left his axe resting against it one evening, in the summer of 1540?"

"An invisible hand hurled it after him, and broke both his legs."

"And Gustaf Slingbunder, who pursued a fox into its branches, was bewitched by the demon in such wise, that he ran in a circle round the tree for six days and nights, till his bones dropped asunder."

“Saint Olaus be with us!”

Erick Rosenkrantz and Sueno continued to gaze at each other in great consternation, while Bothwell looked at them alternately with astonishment, till the blast of a horn at the gate arrested their attention, and a Danish archer approached, to inform his excellency the Governor of Aggerhuis, that a royal messenger from Copenhagen required an audience.

“So this unmannerly boor hath rejected my suit!” muttered the haughty Earl, as he turned away; “mine—by St. Paul! I can scarcely believe my senses. If my *roué* friends d’Elbœuff or Coldinghame heard of it, they would cast a die to decide which was the greater fool—Bothwell or Rosenkrantz. Rejected! Be it so; but to have this damsel on my own terms shall *now* be my future care.”

CHAPTER IX.

LORD HUNTLY’S LETTER.

ANNA, who might have formed some excuse for Konrad, (whom she supposed to have voluntarily expatriated himself, as he threatened), maintained a silence on the subject of their last interview, and, wholly occupied with her new and glittering lover, troubled herself no more about the old one.

She was teaching the Earl the polsk, the national dance of the Norse, and to which they are enthusiastically attached. Christina and three other attendants played on the ghittern, harp, and tabor, taking at times a part in the figures of the dance.

While the Earl, with his cloak and rapier flung aside, and having one arm round the waist of Anna, was performing with her a succession of those rapid whirls which make this dance so closely to resemble the modern waltz, Black Hob of Ormiston entered the hall, and beckoned him with impatience in his gestures.

“How now!” said the Earl, pausing; “is it the devil in the bush again? Thou hast a face of vast importance, Hob. By Jove! it seems to swell out even that voluminous ruff of thine!”

"Peradventure there be reason. Behold! here are letters from Copenhagen."

"Hah! say you so?"

"Sent by that king's messenger who came hither but an hour ago!"

"Pardon me, Lady Anna," said the Earl with sudden confusion; "I must speak with my friend, but will rejoin you in a few minutes. Whose seals are these, Hob?" he asked, as they descended to the terrace, hurriedly by the way, examining the square packets, which were tied with ribbons, and sealed with wax at the crossing. "By the Holy Paul! 'tis from Frederick of Denmark this!"

"And *this* from the Earl of Huntly; see! it bears the boar-heads of Gordon and the lions of Badenoch!"

"Oh, death and fury! it will be but one tissue of reproaches and upbraidings from the Lady Jane. Throw it into the sea!"

"What! wilt thou not read it before?"

"I could scarcely do so *after*. Read it thyself!" replied Bothwell; "for Huntly and I have nothing now in common!"

Each tore open a letter, and began slowly and laboriously to decipher the cramped and contracted hand-writing so common to the sixteenth century. The effect of these communications was very different on the readers. A bright smile spread over the broad visage of the Knight of Ormiston; while a frown, black as a thunder-cloud, gathered on the dark brow of Bothwell.

"Fury!" he exclaimed, crushing up the letter. "God's fury, and his malison to boot! be on this white-livered dog—this foul traitor!"—

"Who—who?"

"Frederick—"

"How—the King of Denmark and Norway! These are hard names for his majesty to receive within his own fortress of Bergen. What tidings?"

"He declines all further correspondence with me concerning the Shetland Isles, and threatens, that if by the vigil of Saint Denis—now but three days hence—we are found within the Danish seas, to send me captive to Queen Mary, with a full account of my mock embassy. 'Tis some machination of my foe-man, Murray."

"Devil burn him!" said Hob. "Well, is it not better, after

all, to be Lord of Bothwell and Hailes, at home in pair ~~scua~~ Scotland, than Prince of Orkney and Lord of Hialtland, branded as a traitor till the very name of Hepburn becomes (like that of Menteath of old) a byword and a scoff in every Scottish mouth—banned alike in the baron's hall and at the peasant's hearth—while thou wouldst writhe hourly to free thy head from under the sure claws of the Danish lion?"

"Right, Hob! Throw his letter into the sea, and, if thou art clerk enough, let us hear what our noble friend, the Lord Huntly, sayeth."

Ormiston read as follows:—

"To the Right Honourable my very good Lord and especial friend, James Earl of Bothwell, Lord of Hailes, Liddesdale, and Shetland, High Admiral, Sheriff of Haddington, and Bailie of Lauderdale, *Give this in haste—haste—haste.*

"We write to hasten your return, as the Queen's Majesty hath relaxit your Lordship and the worshipful Laird of Ormiston from the horn, and hath banished the Lords Moray, Morton, and others, your enemies, into England, quhere they are now residing and resett at the frontier town of Berwick, for the slaughter of umquhile David Rizzio, her Grace's Italian seeretary. Her Majesty desireth me to reaal you to her presence, with solemn assurance that your sentence of forfeiture is reversed, your fiefs and honours restored. My dearest sister, the Lady Jane, and my bedfellow, the Lady Anne, send their devoted love to your Lordship.

"So the blessing of our Lady be with you, and grant you long life and great commoditie!

"Done at our castle of Strathbolgie in the Garioch. on the vigil of St. Cuthbert the Confessor, 1565.

"HUNTLY."

Ormiston threw up his bonnet, his black eyes flashed and filled with tears, as he exclaimed—

"Now, God's blessing on her Grace! from this hour I am her leal man and true. Now man, Bothwell, I am sick to death of this grim Norwayn castle, and its old ale-drinking, chess-playing, and pudding-pated castellan, who is part woodman, part fisherman—half knight, half bear—and I long to see the yellow corn waving on my ain rigs of Ormiston, with the

grey turrets of my auld peel-tower, looking down on bonny Teviotdale. Would I were there now, and three hundred of my tall troopers with lance, and horse, and bonnets of steel, all trotting by my side. Benedicite!"

"Three hundred devils! thy wits have gone woolgathering. I have promised love and troth to Anna; and if I return with her as my bride, Huntly and Aboyne, Black Arthur and Auchindoune, will all come down like roaring lions from the hills of Badenoch and the wilds of Strathbolgie—so that I may as well stay here and face Frederick."

"What! dost *thou* fear a feud with the gay Gordons?"

"Thou knowest," replied the Earl haughtily, "that I fear nothing, as I shall show thee. I love this girl with my whole heart, Ormiston; yet now, when the first fierce burst of love is past, I see the folly of a man like me being tied like a love-knot to a woman's kirtle."

"Leave her behind thee here."

"I cannot—I cannot! What a moment of imbecility was that when I betrothed myself to Jane of Huntly!"

"A cursed coil! women on both hands; danger in returning, and danger in remaining. Our Lady direct us!"

"Dost think she will interest herself in the affairs of such a couple of rascals as we are?"

"Thou speakest for thyself."

"Nay, I speak for thee in particular."

"Thou gettest angry," said Ormiston; "remember the old saw—'He that is angry is seldom at ease.'"

"Tush! True it is," said Bothwell musingly, after a long pause—"I love Anna better than my own life, and, because winning her may cost me some trouble and danger; yet I feel that to wed her is to wreck my ship on a dangerous shore. I am grown indifferent to Lady Jane, because I may have her for the asking—besides, I am sick of dark eyes."

"Especially Parisian!"

The Earl's brow knit, but he continued gently—

"I have promised marriage to both; and to one my plight must be broken. What matters it? 'Tis only to a woman; and did not one whom I loved with all the depth and holiness of a first love, slight that passion as valueless, and laugh me to scorn when she chose another?"

"Remain here, and we shall be sent captives to Scotland."

where all the particulars of our pretended embassy to Denmark will be discovered."

"And if I return with this little Norwegian by my side, St. Paul! but I must keep my best sword buckled there too!"

"Anything thou likest, but let us leave this desolate land. Let us once more have our feet on Scottish ground, and our hands on our bridles; we shall then make our own terms with Huntly and the Queen. If this dame Anna will go—"

"Go! oh, thou knowest not how the little creature loves me! Ardent and impulsive to excess, she will follow me wherever I list."

"While the fit lasts," rejoined Ormiston drily. "Take her with thee, but leave her with some of thy friends in Orkney till we hear how matters go at Holyrood. There is old Sir Gilbert Balfour of Westera, will keep her close enough in his strong castle of Noltland, where, when once thou seest the queen again, she may chance to remain for the term of her natural life."

Hob paused, and scratched his rough beard with a knowing expression; for he knew enough of his friend to foresee how matters would be in a month.

"Out upon thee, Hob!" said he; "thou art ever prompting me to some knavery."

"But this letter of Huntly—"

"Thank heaven it came!"

"Thou wert about to throw it into the sea."

"St. Mary! but for its contents we must have sailed on a hopeless quest to France, to Italy, or to heaven knows where; for I am already too well known by evil repute throughout the most of Europe. But away, Ormiston, to the harbour. Seek David Wood, our wight skipper, and that red-breeched knave, Hans Knuber, who assists him. Let them have our *Fleur-de-llys* ready to sail. I will hie me to Anna, and 'tis not unlikely we may put to sea about dusk."

A smile was exchanged.

"Gramercy!" said the knight, "I hope she will not forget to bring her maid, who views my outward man with a favourable eye, so that we may all sail merrily together. Hey for hame! By cock and pie! I almost fancy myself at my ain tower-yett, with my broad banner displayed, and my stout horsemen behind me. Ho! for one headlong gallop by Ettrickshaws or Teviot-side—*Te Deum laudamus!* God's blessing on our own land,

that lies beyond the sea, for it is like no other!" and whirling his bonnet round his head, more like a great schoolboy than a strong man of six feet eight inches, Ormiston with one bound sprang down the steep steps leading from the terrace to the shore; while the Earl, somewhat slowly and thoughtfully for so ardent a lover, returned to the presence of Anna, who, piqued by his long and unceremonious absence, was pleased to receive him with a pouting lip and a clouded brow, which his caresses soon dispelled.

CHAPTER X.

THE HERMIT OF BERGEN.

THE Reformation had been accomplished in Denmark and Norway, during the reign of Frederick I., about thirty years before the period of which we write. It had made great progress among the simple and half-barbarian Norse, who, though they had laid the ancient hierarchy in the dust, received nothing equal in exchange; and consequently the codes of religion and morality lay lightly on the necks of the people.

A Catholic church was still permitted at Gluckstadt; the title of bishop, the auricular confessional, the crucifix, and other Romish rites and ceremonies, were still retained, though the government was avowedly and essentially Lutheran. Some persons adhered rigidly to the ancient form of worship, others to the new; but many more took a middle and very convenient course, and for a time believed in—nothing.

It was while matters were in this state, particularly in the province of Aggerhuis—that a half-crazed monk, who had belonged to a suppressed monastery in Fuhnen, and whose brain was said to have been turned by the severities to which he had been subjected by the ecclesiastical superintendent of the reformed church in that diocese, became an anchorite, and undisputed occupant of a cavern on the fiord, near the castle of Bergen. The fame of his austerity, the severity of his penances, and the circumstance of his having made his dwelling in a cavern which for ages had been the reputed habitation of Zernebok an evil demon, whose name is familiar to the Norse, had been quite

enough to procure him a fame beyond the province of Agger-huis. By night the fishermen shuddered, crossed themselves, and sedulously avoided the long ray of light that streamed from the mouth of his deep cavern upon the glassy waters of the bay; for, notwithstanding his reputation for sanctity and holiness on the one hand, he was dreaded for possessing various supernatural and unpriestly attributes on the other.

But to return from this digression, which was necessary, as the hermit is about to be introduced with due formality to the reader, we may briefly state that the gay Earl, notwithstanding all his eloquence and powers of persuasion, which were very great, failed to prevail on Anna Rosenkrantz to make an unconditional elopement with him; nor would her pride and self-esteem permit her to trust implicitly to one whom she knew to have earned at Copenhagen the dubious reputation of a finished gallant and accomplished courtier.

Much as she loved him, and—notwithstanding her inconstancy to Konrad, she loved him well—Anna could not so utterly sacrifice the name and honour of her family, or be so oblivious of that delicacy which a Norwegian maiden so seldom forgets; and thus, though Bothwell urged with all the oily eloquence that love, ardour, and gallantry lent him, the danger of that delay which would sacrifice him to Rosenkrantz, who in three days, by the king's mandate, would be compelled to make him a prisoner, Anna only wept, and would not—could not—consent to accompany him, unless—

“Unless we are wedded; is it not so, dearest Anna?” said the handsome noble, as she reclined helplessly and in tears on his bosom, within the alcove of the terrace that overlooked the bay.

Anna made no reply.

“Decide, dearest, decide!” urged the Earl, pointing to his ship that was now gallantly riding in the fiord with her white canvass half unloosed, and glimmering white in the faint twilight of the northern evening. “Decide! for by the express command of the governor, your uncle, I must be far beyond yon blue horizon ere the sun rises; and then thou wilt see me no more!”

Anna sobbed bitterly, and she thought of the triumph the rejected Konrad might feel and display, if the Earl sailed without her. Proud, and perhaps not a little artful, her heart was torn

by love, doubt, and anguish ; and her answers were very incoherent.

“Oh ! what would my uncle Rosenkrantz say, if—”

“I have bade adieu to Rosenkrantz, and he seems me already on board. Since the arrival of King Frederick’s mandate, he has been so full of vapour and dignity, that, though I cannot but laugh at it, we can hold no further communication ; and if, after my late proposal, which he so scornfully rejected, he knew I was here—and with thee—”

“True, true, we would be separated.”

“And for ever ! I know your scruples, dearest Anna,” said the Earl, tenderly ; for, moved by her tears, and the utter abandonment in which she reclined on his breast, with her face half hidden by the bright masses of her hair, and, by her position, permitting soft glimpses of a full and beautiful bosom, he felt that he loved her with his whole heart ; and that the troth he had plighted to Lady Gordon, the vengeance of the fierce Highland noble, her brother, and the wrath or favour of the Scottish court, were all alike to be committed to oblivion. Love bore all before him victoriously for the time ; and Bothwell, ever the creature of impulses, yielded to that of the moment.

“Hear me for the last time,” he urged. “The good hermit, of whom I have heard you speak so often, and whose abode is in the cavern among yonder rocks, from which we now see a ray of light that trembles on the water, will unite us, and in my own land will I wed thee again, with such magnificence as becomes a bride of the house of Hailes. Consent, dearest Anna ! and one blast on my horn will bring a barge to the beach ; refuse, and we must part, Anna, never to meet again.”

She could make no reply, but drew closer to her winning lover, and exchanged with him one long and passionate kiss, and Bothwell well knew that he had triumphed.

“My beloved Anna !” he murmured, as he raised her in his arms, and felt at the moment that ever to love another than this fair being, who trusted to him so implicitly, would be sacrilege, and an impossibility.

“Christina—call Christina Slingbunder ! Oh ! I cannot go alone,” she sobbed.

Bothwell, aware that there was not a moment to lose, beckoned to the waiting-woman, who had been lingering at the corner of the terrace ; and who, without knowing what was to ensue, fol-

lowed him, while he half led and half bore her mistress down the steep and devious pathway that led to the beach.

Darkness had almost set in ; the long Norwegian twilight had given place to starry night, and they were unseen by the Danish sentinels, who lounged dreamily on the summit of the keep, and at the castle gate of Bergen. As he descended, Bothwell drew from his embroidered belt a small but exquisitely carved bugle-horn, accoutred with a silver mouthpiece, on which he blew one short and sharp blast of peculiar cadence, that drew an echo from every rock and indentation of the harbour. Ere the last had died away, the sound of oars was heard, the water was seen to flash in the starlight, and a boat glided into the dark shadow thrown by the castle rocks upon the deep water of the fiord ; it jarred against the landing-place, and Christina Slingbunder, who was about to make some violent protestations against proceeding, had the strong arm of Ormiston thrown around her.

"Welcome, Bothwell !" said he ; " never heard I sound more joyous than thy bugle ; for the last hour our wight skipper hath been swearing like a pagan."

"Wherefore?"

"At thy delay."

"Then the knave must e'en solace himself by swearing on."

"He says, if this breeze continues, we will be past Frederik's-vaern by sunrise."

"All the better, Hob," replied the Earl, as he lifted Anna on board ; "but I hope he hath our demi-eulverins east loose, and a few yeomen in their armour, in case of surprisal."

"Right—dost thou not see I am in harness?" said Ormiston, making his steel glove clatter on his corselet ; for, save the head, his whole bulky frame was completely armed. The eight seamen who pulled the boat were all clad in pyne doublets, and armed with swords and daggers, and they wore the national head-dress, the broad bonnet of blue worsted, adorned with a silver coronet and horse's head—the Earl's crest.

"Now, my stout varlets," said their lord, "dip and away!"

"Away for the ship!" added Ormiston.

"Nay, for the hermit's grotto under yonder rocks, where thou seest a light now gleaming on the water. Away, and a golden angel on the best oar!"

Ormiston gave a low whistle, expressive of surprise and pity at the folly of his friend, and endeavoured, by a series of some-

what unceremonious caresses, to console the sobbing and half-frightened Christina, who had begun to weep most obstreperously; but he knew enough of the Earl's temperament to be aware that any remark was now futile; and, in reality, as he cared not a rush whether he married the Norwegian or not, he resolved to let matters run their course.

All sat silent, and nothing was heard but the interjections of the waiting-woman, and the suppressed breathing of the stout oarsmen, as the boat strained and creaked when their sinewy efforts shot her out into midstream. Anna reclined against the shoulder of the Earl, with her face hidden in a satin hood, and his mantle of crimson velvet rolled around her.

Now, rising in her silvery glory from the sea, the broad, round moon, with a splendour impossible to describe, aided the brightness of the northern night. One broad gleam of steady radiance extended up the fiord from the horizon to the shore; and when, like a black speck, the boat shot across it, the breakers of the distant ocean, like wavelets of silver, were seen rising and falling afar off, amid the liquid light.

The summit of the rocks of Bergen, and the square tower that crowned them, were shining snow-white in its splendour, but their base was hidden in more than Cimmerian gloom; for, though the bright moonlight tipped the eminences and peaks of the far-off mountain, the darkness of midnight rested on the bosom of the still fiords and bays that rolled in shadow a thousand feet below them.

From the murky obscurity of a mass of granite, that overhung the deepest part of the fiord, where the rocks descended like a wall abruptly to their foundations, many fathoms under the surface of the water, a faint and flickering light, that gleamed redly and fitfully, directed the steersman to the uncouth dwelling of this hermit of the sea. A sudden angle of the rocks revealed it, and the oarsmen found themselves close to a low-browed cavern, that receded away into the heart of the granite cliffs that overhung the surf.

A seaman made fast the boat, by looping a rope round a pinnacle of rock near the narrow ledge, where the fishermen of Bergen usually left such alms and offerings as fear or piety impelled them to bestow on the hermit, whom they alike dreaded and respected. On these rocks the sea-dogs basked in summer, and shared the hermit's food in winter, when they crawled through

the crevices in the ice, that for six months of the year covered the water of the bay.

The Scottish mariners, who did not altogether like their vicinity to the abode of this mysterious personage, cowered together, conversing in low whispers; and their swarthy visages seemed to vary from brown to crimson, in the red, smoky light that gushed at times from the mouth of the rugged cavern, as the ocean wind blew through it. Bothwell, who could not for a moment quit the trembling Anna, requested Hob of Ormiston to acquaint the recluse with the nature of the boon they had come to crave of him.

Participating in the fears of the mariners, Hob evidently did not admire venturing on this mission alone. On one hand, a powerful curiosity prompted him; on the other, a childish superstition, incident to the age, withheld him; but he was a bold fellow, whose scruples of any kind never lasted long, and in a minute he had loosened his long sword in its sheath, looked to the wheel-lock of his dagger, and sprung up the rocks. His tall feather was seen to stoop for a moment as he entered the cavern, and made signs of the cross as he advanced; for, though the Laird of Ormiston, like most of the lesser barons in Scotland for a generation or two after 1540, professed no particular creed, any ideas he had of religion appertained to the Church of Rome—therefore the aspect of the cabin, as he penetrated, was singularly adapted to make a deep impression on his mind.

A pile of driftwood blazing in a cleft of the rock, through which its smoke ascended, filled the cavern with warmth; and a red glow, that lit up the rugged surface of its rocky walls and arched roof, displaying the wild lichens that spotted them, and the green tufts of weed that grew in the crannies.

A myriad of metallic particles, green schorl, blue quartz, rock crystal, and basaltic prisms, glittered in the blaze of the hermit's fire. It revealed also the strange and ghastly fissures of the cavern, which had been formed by some vast subterranean throe of nature, that had rent asunder the solid mountains; and, by hurling one gigantic mass of rock against another, formed this deep retreat, into which Hob of Ormiston penetrated with a resolute aspect, but a hesitating heart.

The roar of a subterranean cataract, that poured down white and foaming behind one of these ghastly seams, lent additional effect to the aspect of the cavern—at the upper end of which

stood an altar of stone, having on it a skull polished like ivory by long use, a rude crucifix, and the words—

Sancte Olaf ora pro nobis,

painted above it on the wall in large and uncouth characters. At the approach of Ormiston, the hermit arose from his lair or bed of dried seaweed, and a more wild and unearthly object had never greeted the eyes of his visitor.

His years might number sixty; he was perfectly bald, and his scalp shone like that of the skull, to which his visage, hollow-eyed and attenuated to the last degree, would have borne no distant resemblance but for the long white beard of thin and silvery hair that flowed to his waist. He was clad in the skin of the sea-dog, and his bare legs and arms were so lean that they resembled the bones of a skeleton, with veins and fibres twisted over them. As the hermit arose, Ormiston paused; and while he gazed with irresolution, the wild man did so with wonder; for the Scottish knight was richly accoutred in a suit of plate armour; his hose were of scarlet cloth twined with gold, and the band of his blue velvet bonnet, like the hilt of his dagger, sparkled with precious stones.

"Heaven save you, father!" said he, uncovering his head, and speaking in that broken Norwegian dialect which he had acquired among the Shetlanders.

"And what, may I ask, hath procured me a visit from a son of vanity and trumpery like thee?" asked the old man of the rock, surveying Ormiston with a glance approaching to disdain.

"An errand of friendship, good father," replied the other, whose uneasiness was in no way soothed when he saw, by the restless and unearthly aspect of the hermit's eyes, that he was evidently insane; "from one who hath a boon to crave of thee."

"Of me—Ha! ha!" laughed the hermit, and the reverberations of his laughter, that echoed a hundredfold through the fissures of the cavern, seemed to the imaginative ear of Ormiston like that of fiends ringing from an abyss, and, signing the cross, he involuntarily drew back. The wild hermit seemed to enjoy his terror, and laughed louder still.

"What wouldst thou have? a blessing implored upon thy vessel, that neither the mermaids of the moskenstrom nor the water-spirit may bewitch it; nor that Nippen may come in the night and turn thy compass round from north to south, and so

lead thee within the folds of the mighty Jormagundr, that great ocean snake which lieth coiled up under the frozen regions of the pole, and one dash of whose tail makes the great whirlpool to boil for a eentury? Hah!"

"Nay, good father," said Ormiston; "for none of these things have I sought thee, but to crave a blessing and the bands of wedloek for a knight and lady, who choose rather to receive their nuptial benediction from thee, who art a remnant of our ancient faith, (Heaven forgive me this vile blasphemy!) than from one of these newfangled parsons whom King Frederick hath planted in Norway."

"Good," replied the hermit, as a smile spread over his ghastly visage; "and what return will be made me if I coneede to your request?"

"Return!" stammered Ormiston, taking a silver chain from his neck, but immediately replacing it, for he saw that he had not to deal with an ordinary man. "Holy father! though the lady is noble, and the knight is both noble and wealthy, they can make no other return than a promise to hold thy name in kind remembrance, and pray for thee daily, in memory of the blessing thou wilt bestow."

"Good again—thou pleasest me; let these strangers approach."

"By what name art thou known, father?"

"The fishermen call me the Hermit of the Roek. When I lived in the world I had another name. I was Saint Olaf of Norway."

"Now, God keep the poor hermit!" said Ormiston; "five hundred years have come and gone since that blessed preacher and converter of these wild lands from pagannie to the true faith, rested from his holy labours."

"Five hundred years! thou sayest right well. All that time have I dwelt in this eavern, where I shall perhaps dwell five hundred more! but lead forward thy friends."

"Blessed Jupiter!" muttered Ormiston, as he hurried away, "methought the tying of this pretended nuptial knot was likely to cost more trouble than the untying of those on the enchanted eord. What, ho! my Lord of Bothwell."

"Odsbody!" exclaimed the Earl, "thou hast tarried long enough in all conscience. Is the occupant of this place man or woman?"

“Neither, by Jove ! I think him half saint, half Satan, and wholly intolerable.”

Anna trembled, and her attendant shrieked with terror, when they were lifted on the ledge of the rock that led to this uncouth dwelling. The seamen, whom the Earl had no wish should witness a ceremony which he might one day prefer to have forgotten, he desired imperatively to remain by their oars, and, as they were all his own vassals, they dared not to disobey.

“You will not follow me unless you hear my bugle blown, in sign that we are in some peril ; and, by St. Andrew, the place looks perilous enough ! But take courage, dearest Anna !” he whispered, “for I am with thee !”

Anna answered only by tears, and kept her face hidden within her hood. Her fears, and those of Christina Slingbunder, were no way allayed by the appalling aspect of Saint Olaf—the hermit of whom they had heard so many tremendous tales ; and even Bothwell, as thorough a dare-devil as ever drew sword, was startled for a moment ; but, pressing Anna closer to him, he advanced at once to the hermit—and, in virtue of the vows he had once pronounced, requested him to unite them in marriage, and bestow his benediction upon them.

Tall Ormiston held his bonnet before his mouth ; for a broad laugh spread over his dark and burly visage when he saw the Earl kneeling before this uncouth priest, whose insanity was so evident that even he, a border baron, felt some shame and reluctance at the profanity and folly of the adventure. When viewed by the light of the pine fire, that at times died away and anon shot up redly and fitfully, the aspect of this wild man of the rock, with his attenuated legs and arms clad in a gaberdine of seal-skin, his long and bushy beard glistening tremulously in the flame like streaming silver, his deeply sunk yet sparkling eyes of most unearthly blue—gave him all the appearance of a half-crazed scald or saga from the frozen caves of Iceland—he seemed so spectral, so shadowy, and so like the wavering vision of a dreamer.

Sinking with terror and confusion, Anna had but a faint idea of all that passed around her, until she found herself once more in the bright moonlight with another ring on her finger, Bothwell’s arm around her, and her burning cheek resting against his ; while the diamond-like water flashed around them as it fell from the broad-bladed oars, and the seamen pulled hard and

silently away from the cavern. The appearance of the hermit, who stood on a pinnacle of rock holding aloft a blazing pine branch with one hand, while he bestowed benedictions with the other, adding not a little to the energy with which they increased the distance between them and the shore. The Earl saw that the poor recluse was perfectly insane, yet there was something singularly wild and sublime in his aspect; he seemed so like an inspired prophet, or seer, or one of those strange demons with whom Norse superstition peoples every element, every wood, and rock, and hill.

Cheerfully pulled the stout rowers, and again the towers of Bergen rose above them, shining snow-white in the light of the autumnal moon. As they neared the ship, the startled Ormiston muttered a curse and a *Hail Mary!* in the same breath, when a long line of fire suddenly gleamed across the bosom of the water, and there shot past their bows a swift boat, in which stood a tall figure brandishing a spear; his whole outline was dark and opaque, while a blaze of light shone behind him.

"'Tis only a night-fisher!" said Anna, with a smile; and now one more stroke of the oars brought them alongside of the Earl's ship, from the mizen-peak of which his own banner, bearing the chevrons of Hepburn and the azure bend of Dirleton, waved heavily in the night wind.

The *Fleur-de-lys* was gaudily painted and gilded, low in the waist, but high in the bows and poop, where two great wooden castles, bristling with falcons and arquebuses, towered above the water. Each mast was composed of two taper spars, fidded at the topcastles. The Earl's crest—a white horse's head—reared up at the prow, balanced by a mighty lantern at the stern. Her sails were loose, and glimmered in the moonlight as they flapped heavily against the yellow masts and spars.

The Earl was welcomed by a shout from the sailors, who, with the master and his mates, crowded, bonnet in hand, around him.

Giving orders to sail immediately for the Isles of Orkney, he bore Anna to the little cabin that, during his wanderings by the Adriatic and Italian shores, had received many a similar tenant. Like a boudoir, it was hung with the richest arras, lighted by silver lamps that were redolent with perfume, as they swung from the deck above, and from globes of rose-coloured glass shed a warm and voluptuous glow around the lovers.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FLEUR-DE-LYS.

It is difficult, says the Magister Absalom, to analyse the nature of the Earl's love for this fair but fickle Norwegian.

His conscience and his interest led him to remember that adherence to those vows so solemnly exchanged with Lady Jane Gordon, was the most honourable and prudent course; but this sudden passion, conceived by him for Anna Rosenkrantz at the Court of Copenhagen, and pursued in that rash and obstinate spirit with which he plunged into every new amour and vagary, soon made him commit to oblivion those vows which *one* yet fondly and sadly brooded over. A temporary separation, an unexpected meeting, as shown in the beginning of our story, had fully developed his sentiments for Anna, and in this mock marriage brought them to a crisis.

Having been frequently abroad, under every variety of fortune --at one time commanding a French army during a desperate civil war; at another, charged with an important embassy; and often an exile desperate in circumstances--in the wandering life he had led for many a year, his career had been one of such wild adventure and danger that his code of morality fitted him loosely as his gauntlet; thus, with all the love he bore Anna, though as yet he shrank from wedding her before the altar of that church where he had knelt in childhood, this espousal of her, before a half-witted Norwegian hermit, exactly suited the wildness of his fancy and the romance of his temperament.

His trusty friend and libertine follower, Hob of Ormiston, whose fate and fortune were so completely identified with his own, knew, from old experience, that the flame of his lord had expanded too suddenly to burn long; and, as the love-fit and the voyage would in all probability end together, he would not have objected to wedding Christina Slingbunder in the same easy and fantastic fashion, although he was already *handfasted*, as the phrase was, to a lady of gentle blood at home.

Though she saw not the clouds that overhung her future career, Anna was very much dejected when next morning she lay with her head reclining on the shoulder of that lover to whom she had sacrificed herself and the love of Konrad, and

into whose hands she had committed the honour of her family and her future fate.

Bright rose the sun from the waters of the Skager Rack ; the hills of Denmark were on their lee, and those of Norway, with all their pouring waterfalls and echoing woods, were lessening far astern. A gentle breeze was blowing from the westward ; and as the heavily-pooped ship careened over, her great white lateen sails bellied before it, and the bright green water flashed from her sharp prows to bubble in snowy showers under the head of the white steed that, with blood-red nostrils and arching neck, reared beneath the gallant bowsprit.

The sailors, with Nicholas Hubert and the Earl's other pages and servants, were grouped in the forecastle and in the deep waist, over which peered the brass arquebuses of the poop. The skipper, Master David Wood of Bonyngtoun, in Angus, with a great gaudy chart (such as was then prepared in the Hanseatic towns for the use of mariners) spread on the capstan, was intently measuring the distance from the Naze of Norway to the Oysterhead of Denmark ; from thence to Thorsmynde, and so on.

He was a short, squat man, with a thick scrubby beard and heavy eyebrows ; he wore his blue bonnet drawn well over his forehead, to keep the sun from his eyes, and had a gaberdine of blue broadcloth, with immense pockets at the sides, red trunk breeches, which met a pair of black funnel boots about three inches below the knee. He carried a pocket-dial and a long dagger at his girdle.

Hob of Ormiston, minus weapons and armour, without which he was never seen on shore, was yawning with ennui, wishing, as he often said, "sea-voyaging at the devil," and (in absence of Christina, who was very sick a-bed) endeavouring to wile away the time by watching for an occasional shot at the passing birds with his wheel-lock caliver, and whistling the old air then so much in vogue—

"The Frog cam to the Myll doore."

Anna and the Earl were seated under a small tapestry awning, which screened them from the view of the groups in the waist on one hand, and from the watch and timoneer on the other. Her eyes were full of tears.

"Anna, dearest, why so sad?" said the Earl, pressing his

dark moustaches against her white forehead. "Do you regret the step you have taken for my sake?"

"Oh, no!" she whispered, in a soft, low tone; "but I sorrow when I think of the Knight Rosenkrantz, my poor old uncle, who since infancy has been so kind to me. My dear and only kinsman, when worn out by years and their infirmities, to be left alone by me in his old age—by me whom he loves so well! Who now will soothe him in sickness as I have done, and cheer him in the long nights of winter when I am far away? My place will be vacant at the board to-day, my chair by the fire to-night. My harp stands there beside it, but he will hear my voice no more. Oh! he will be very lonely—desolate!" Her tears fell fast and bitterly.

"Speak not thus, dear Anna!" said the Earl, kissing her again; and, glad to say anything that might soothe her, he added, "We will return to him again, and together will we cheer his declining years."

"But he never will forgive me, nor love me as of old."

"He will! We shall kneel at his feet and implore his forgiveness (Ormiston whistled very loud); and, if he loves you so well, he could never resist your supplications."

He kissed her with ardour, and the girl was soothed.

Fondly and trustfully she looked in his face. There was a light in her clear eyes, a flush on her soft cheek, and an infantile smile on her cherry lips, that made her quite bewitching, as she lay half-fainting on Bothwell's breast and half-embraced by him, listening to his oft-repeated, and perhaps too voluble vows of constancy and love.

"Farewell, dear Norway—a long farewell!" she exclaimed, kissing her hand with playful sadness to the distant stripe of blue that showed where her native hills were fading far astern. "I may no more hear the rush of thy waterfalls, or see thy pine-clad hills and deep salt fiords, overhung by the sweetbriar and purple lilac that scent their waters in summer, or the silver-birch and dark-green pine that shadow them in autumn and in winter; but oh! Gammle Norgé, I never will forget thee!"

"Anna," said the Earl, "from the ramparts of my castle of Bothwell I will show thee a valley of the Clyde, and such a territory as no lord in all Scandinavia could show his bride; and bethink thee, that hold of Bothwell is thrice more magni-

fieent than Frederick's castle of Elsinour. I have eight stately fortresses, the least of which would make four of yonder castle of Bergen ; I have four lordships, each of which is richer than your native province of Aggerhuis ; and I have four sheriffdoms, each of which is worth three of it—and thou shalt be lady of them all ! When I wind this horn from Bothwell castle-gate, it finds so ready an echo at the tower of Lawhope, the house of Clelland, the keep of Orbiestoun, and the place of Calder, that five thousand men, all dight for battle, are in their stirrups, and a hundred knights, the best in Scotland, are proud to unfurl their pennons beneath the banner of James Hepburn of Hailles !”

The Earl's eyes sparkled with enthusiasm, and those of Anna lit up with delight and pride ; while Ormiston, who considered himself the representative of these hundred good palladia, adjusted his ruff complacently, and drew himself to the full extent of his six feet odd inches.

“And,” whispered Anna, “and will you always love me as you do now ?”

“O yes—ever and always !” replied the impassioned lover.

Ormiston whistled dubiously, and then continued his ditty—

“The Frog cam to the Myll doore,
And a low bow made he, O !
Saying, ‘Gie, Sir Miller, a scrap o’ thy store
To a frog of gentle degree, O !”

CHAPTER XII.

THE ISLE OF WESTERAY.

THE course of the Earl's ship lay westward ; but heavy gales blew her far to the north, and for many days she beat about in that tempestuous ocean which roars around the hundred Isles of Shetland, pouring its foam upon their bluff precipices and into the vast and resounding caverns that perforate their stern shores, many of which have never seen other inhabitants than the gigantic erne that built its nest in the cliffs, the wild horse that browsed on the moor, and the whiskered walrus that basked on the beach below.

On others lie the rude towers and dwellings of the hardy Udallers, the ruined forts and runic tombs of those old ocean kings, who were so long the terror of Britain, of Belgium, and

of Gaul—the temples of the Druids, the uncouth crosses and gothic chapels of that later creed which Columba preached, and for which Saint Erick died—and the obelisks that mark the lonely graves of the old Kuldei overlook the reedy moors, the foaming maelstroms, and the rushing surges of the Ultima Thule.

For fourteen days dark grey clouds had overhung that struggling ship. The sullenness of the sailors at the continuance of an adverse wind was communicated to the Earl, who became petulant; for Anna and her attendant were very unwell, and nothing cures love so much as a dose of sea-sickness. On the fifteenth day the sun rose brightly from the ocean, and tipped with light the dreary hills of Unst; the clouds dispersed, a fair wind swept over the water, and the *Fleur-de-lys* bore away merrily for Westeray, an isle of Innistore, where stood the stronghold of Noltland, possessed by one of Bothwell's chief friends and adherents, Sir Gilbert Balfour, a powerful baron, and cadet of the house of Monkquhanny, in Fifeshire.

Anna, we have said, was very sick and sorrowful. The Earl scarcely left the side of her couch in the little tapestried cabin; and though in her pallor and helplessness she was as beautiful as ever, the Magister Absalom records, in his stiff, dry way, that Bothwell could not resist the bitter and obtruding reflection, that it might have been better (considering the turn of fortune in his favour at home) if his vessel had *not* been driven into the harbour of Bergen, on the night in which this history opened.

In their bud he endeavoured to crush these ungenerous and ungrateful thoughts; but they recurred to him again and again, till one glance of Anna's pleading eyes, one smile of her pretty mouth, would put them all to flight, and he felt that he could brave both Huntly and the queen for her sake. Yet whenever he was alone or beyond the immediate influence of her charms, ambition, as of old, began to whisper in his ear and gnaw at his heart; pride and self-interest were on one hand—love and generosity on the other.

The first flush of love was over.

Though he did not as yet entirely repent his strange espousal of this fair northern girl, he foresaw that it would prove a formidable barrier to his gaining any permanent ascendancy over the faction of Moray and Morton, as the principal strength of the Catholic lords consisted in their unanimity, which was certain

of being at an end, whenever Huntly learned how Bothwell had broken his promise to his sister, Lady Jane Gordon.

Ormiston had mentally been making similar reflections ; and when a dark cloud gathered on the broad and noble brow of Bothwell, or an expression of deep meditation veiled the brightness of his fine dark eyes, he knew well what visions were struggling for mastery in his bold and ambitious heart. But the knight never intruded a remark of his own ; and remembering how often, when in the full glow of his new amour, the Earl had so scornfully rejected his more sage advice, he resolved quietly to let fate have its own way.

At the close of a stormy day, the isle of Westeray, like a dark blue cloud, arose from ocean on their lee. Dark and lowering the sky communicated its inky hue to the sea, which was flecked by spots of white, that marked the crests of the waves. Like snow, their surf was poured upon the jutting rocks and hidden reefs that fringe the island ; and thus, when night closed in, a white line of breakers alone indicated where it lay.

As the sun set, his sickly rays poured a yellow light along the waste of waters, and lit up with a parting gleam the gigantic façade of the castle of Noltland, which towered above the rocks of Westeray, with its heavy battlements and tourelles at the angles, its broad chimneys and stone-flagged tophouses gleaming redly and duskily against the murky sky beyond. The light faded away from its casements, one by one they grew dark, and an hour after the sun had set, the *Fleur-de-lys* anchored on that side of the isle which is sheltered from the waves of the Atlantic.

Joyously the Earl and his companions sprang upon the rude pier, alongside of which their vessel was hauled after great labour, and much swearing and vociferation by the seamen. The night was now intensely black, but the darkness of the beach was partially dispelled by the blaze of ten or twelve torches, which were upheld by the retainers of the Baron of Noltland, who hastened to the pier to receive the Earl.

Sir Gilbert Balfour of Westeray, who, to the office of master of the household to Queen Mary, united the captaincy of the royal castle of Kirkwall, was a man above the middle height, strongly made, powerfully limbed, and well browned by constant exposure to the weather. His hair and beard, which were trimmed very short, were of the deepest black. He was richly

attired in a doublet of yellow satin, embroidered with Venetian gold; a scarlet mantle lined with white silk hung from his left shoulder, and a small ruff fringed the top of a bright steel gorget that encircled his neck. His bonnet and trunk-hose were of black velvet. He carried a walking-cane, but was without other arms than one of those long daggers such as were then made at the Bowhead of Edinburgh. The magnificence of his attire, which glittered in the torchlight, contrasted forcibly with that of his islesmen who crowded about him.

Four or five, who seemed to act as a body-guard, wore iron helmets adorned with eagles' feathers, coats-of-mail composed of minute rings of steel linked together, and reaching nearly to their ankles. They carried battle-axes, and short but powerful handbows slung on their backs, and crossed saltirewise by sheafs of barbed arrows. Others were clad in sealskin doublets, with plaids of purple and blue check, and kilts of dark-brown stuff; but all were barefooted, barelegged, and barearmed—strong, muscular, red-haired, and savage-looking men—whose hazel-eyes glistened through their matted locks in the light of the streaming torches.

"Noble Bothwell—welcome to Westeray!" exclaimed Sir Gilbert, vailing his bonnet. "I knew thy banner at a mile distant, when it glittered in that brief blink of sunshine. Ha! stout Ormiston, I have not seen thee since the day we fought side by side at the battle of Corrichie! Welcome home!"

"Balfour, I thank thee!" said Ormiston; "but dost thou call this home? By Jove! I deem that we have many a long Scottish mile to travel yet, ere we find ourselves under our own rafters."

"And if the same mischances attend me," said Bothwell, "I may cruise about in these northern seas like another Ulysses, but without acquiring his wisdom. However, I have brought my Calypso with me. Ha! ha! now I warrant, my trusty Gib Balfour, thou hast never read of this same Sir Ulysses!"

"Read! St. Mary forefend! though my brother, the Lord President, has compiled a notable book of 'Praetiques,' I never could read nor write either, praise God! and by his aid never shall. I can bite the pen and make my mark, in sign of the blessed cross, like my father, the stout knight of Monkquhanny, before me. Of what service are booklear or scholarcraft to a knight or gentleman of coat-armour? Nay, pshaw! I leave all

such to monks and scribes—to knaves and notaries—and content me with the knowledge of arms, stable-craft, and falconrie, siclike as becometh me; but this Sir Ulysses—what manner of knight was he? came he from the Mearns or the west country?”

“A wise warrior he was, who fought valiantly at Troy, and he loved an enchantress such as I have with me now.”

“Thou, my lord!”

“Ay, in yonder vessel.”

“A sorceress—God forebode!” said Balfour, stepping back a pace; “we must have her burnt! The sheriff court of Kirk-wall meets at Lammas-tide. ’Tis well!” Bothwell laughed.

“Thou mistakest me, honest Balfour! The enchantress I mean, is a fair girl whom I have brought with me from Norway, and who deals in no spells save such as win the heart. She is a lady of high birth and rare beauty too; so brush up thy rusty chivalry, Sir Gilbert, and let me have a litter forthwith for her conveyance.”

“A lady! forsooth such brittle ware will find but rough accommodation among us islesmen here at Noltland, where a silken kirtle hath not been seen these ten good years, ha! ha!”

At that moment, Anna, supported by Ormiston and Christina her attendant, appeared at the side of the vessel, about to cross a broad plank that extended to the rough wooden pier, overlooked by the great donjon tower of Noltland. She was very pale; but the torchlight shed a tinge of red on her cheek, and caused her heavy locks to glitter as the night wind waved them to and fro.

The plank shook, and a half-stifled cry of fear escaped from Anna. Bothwell advanced to her assistance, but at the instant a young man sprang from the crowd of islesmen behind Sir Gilbert Balfour, dropped into the water, seized the plank with both hands to steady it, while presenting his shoulder for the lady to lean on.

She touched it lightly with her hand, and murmured her thanks as she passed.

A low sigh fell upon her ear; and, with that quick apprehension of sorrow and interest which is so characteristic of women, Anna turned to her supporter, but his face was bent down and concealed, and she felt agitated—she knew not why.

The young man trembled so much that he almost sank when she touched him. He looked up once; there was a rustling of

satin—a dreamy sense of perfume and starched lace, and the vision passed away. He was Konrad!

Ah! had Anna seen the deep and earnest, the sorrowful and affectionate expression that lit his soft and upturned eyes, her heart would assuredly have smote her; but the splendid Earl of Bothwell seized her hand, and led her towards Sir Gilbert Balfour, by whom she was hurried away.

Lighted by torches that streamed and spluttered in the night wind, and flared on the rugged rocks that reared from the frothy ocean, the group ascended the narrow and winding pathway that led to the castle. Konrad gazed wistfully after them, with his hands pressed upon his forehead, and with the air of one who struggles to preserve his senses.

When drifting about at the sport of the waves of the Christiana fiord, and almost insensible from cold and misery, he had been picked up by a small galliot bound for Kirkwall, and the crew had landed him in Westeraay a week before the arrival of Bothwell.

He had been protected by Balfour, who, being kind-hearted and hospitable, felt interested in the young man on witnessing the dejection and utter prostration of spirit under which he laboured.

The despair of a heart that has loved truly, and been deceived, is sometimes so deep that no one can imagine its intensity. So it was with Konrad.

The deep, dark consciousness of desolation that had been settling over him, might have become in time a more subdued and morbid feeling of regret; but now this sudden meeting brought back all his first hopes and emotions to their starting-place, and renewed in poignancy all the agony of that hour, in which he learned that he had lost her for ever.

CHAPTER XIII.

NOLTLAND.

THE long twilight of the northern eve had passed away, and the darkness of an October night had closed over Westeraay.

Tall, and grim, and dark, save where lit by an occasional ray from a window, the Keep of Noltland towered in massive outline above the rocky isle.

This magnificent castle was built by Thomas de Tulloch, bishop and governor of Orkney, under Erick, King of Denmark, about 1422. It was surrounded by massive walls and out-works; the sides of the great keep were perforated by a series of loopholes for quarrelles or cannon, rising tier above tier like the gun-ports of a line-of-battle ship. Many parts of this vast baronial hold are richly decorated by the skill and fancy of the architect, whom tradition avers to have found his grave within its walls, and a large stone, shaped like a coffin, is still pointed out at the foot of the great staircase, as covering the place of his last repose.

The stately hall of the Bishop's castle glowed cheerfully in the blaze of the fire that crackled in the arched fireplace, where a pile of driftwood blazed, the fragments of old wrecks that, could they have spoken, might have told many a tale of suffering and of war, with logs of resinous pine brought from Norway, or washed on the beach from the savage and then unknown coasts of the Labrador.

From the roof hung a large brazen chandelier, in which the flames of twelve tall candles were streaming in the currents of air that swept through the vast apartment. The floor was paved with stone, which, though originally of red rock like the walls, was carefully whitened and sanded. The great oak gurnels and cabinets, the tables and chairs, were all of the fashion of James III.; and behind them, on rusty tenter-hooks, hung long pieces of rude and carpet-like tapestry, representing, in dark and gigantic figures, the voyage of Æneas, and other passages from Virgil. As the wind moved the arras, the great mishapen figure of the pious Trojan, his long-haired Creusa and chubby Ascanius, seemed at times as if starting into life. At the lower end of the hall, and almost lost in the shadow of its vast vacuity, were several retainers of Westera, clad in their mail shirts and brown kilts, lolling on hard wooden settles, conversing in guttural whispers, or sleeping under the side-tables rolled up in their plaids, looking like bundles of tartan with a mop-stick through them—the latter being represented by their shock heads of hair.

A trivet-table, marked with a diagram for playing the old chivalric game of Troy, was placed near the fire, and thereon lay cards and dice, and a tall pewter tankard of malmsey wine, from which the silver-mounted horns were incessantly replenished

by Bothwell, Ormiston, and the Knight of Noltland, who, with their doublets unbuttoned and their gorgets and swordbelts flung aside, were lounging by the ruddy fire and conversing with animation, but marked by a gravity rather unusual for the two first-named personages.

Anna, who, with her attendant, had been conducted to suitable apartments, had retired for the night, leaving Bothwell and his friends to pursue their political conversation, and to drink their wine undisturbed, which they did with the devotion of three Germans quaffing for a wager.

"And this is all thou knowest of the machinations of Moray? Ah! false bastard, I shall live to mar thee yet!" exclaimed the Earl, with kindling eyes, on hearing Balfour unfold the web of intrigue that surrounded the young Queen Mary. "And my barony of Crichtoun too! saidst thou, Sir Gilbert, that Morton had cast his gloating eyes on that?"

"Yea; and but for this late raid at Holyrood, had added it to his adjacent fiefs of Dalkeith and Vogrie."

"And so they have slain this Rizzio! I remember him well—a smooth-tongued old Italian, somewhat gay in his garb, but crooked in form, and weasoned in visage. Did he not succeed Monsieur Raullet as foreign secretary?"

"The same."

"And they slew him, poor knave!"

"It was on the evening of the 9th of March last, when the Queen's Grace sat at supper with her sister, the Countess Jane of Argyle, and Rizzio seated between their tabourettes twangling on his glittern, when the High Chancellor seized the palace gates at the head of a hundred and fifty tall spearmen, in corselets and steel bonnets, while my Lords of Lindesay and Ruthven, with King Henry and a hundred more, in their armour, ascended by the secret stair to the turret-chamber in James V.'s tower. The poor Italian skipped about like a maukin, and cried aloud in his native gibberish for mercy; but, by the mass! he found little of that, for they dragged him from the skirt of the shrieking Queen, and slew him within earshot of her Majesty, whom Andrew Kerr—"

"Of Fawdounside?" said Ormiston; "a stout man and a bold. I know tall Andrew well."

"Is said to have handled somewhat roughly, for he bent a cocked pistollette against her breast."

"Of Mary?—of a woman about to become a mother!" said the Earl, grasping his poniard. "Would to St. Paul I had been within arm's length of him! But what hath drawn the ire of his most sapient Majesty and the Protestant Lords upon this poor Italian?"

"Heaven alone knoweth,* unless it be that her Majesty favoured him greatly for his superior scholarcraft, which, like witchcraft and every other craft, is often like unto a sharp sword that cutteth its own scabbard. Royal favour, as thou well knowest, Bothwell, will soon make a man hated by his compeers; and thus Rizzio was hated, and so slain, for they left him in the adjoining chamber, gashed by six-and-fifty sword and dagger-wounds, with the King's poniard driven to the hilt in his brisket, to show by whose mandate the deed was done."

"'Twas right Venetian that."

"And further, knowest thou that Master Craig, the minister of St. Giles, that Master Knox, and the father of that buxom bride whom he won by his damnable sorceries—even the pious and godly Lord of Ochiltree—are all art and part in the assassination of this poor stranger, whom they deemed their only barrier to the ear and eye of her Majesty?"

"How," said Bothwell ironically, "darest thou thus malign our Scottish apostles?"

"Nay, I malign none; but this is well known to my brother the President, who, as thou art aware, is ever fishing in troubled waters, that *they were* in the conspiracy. Ha!" he added, with a dark frown, "thinkest thou that this knave Knox, who leagued with the sacrilegious murderers of my kinsman, the great Cardinal of St. Stephen, would quail at crushing this harmless bookworm—this poor Italian violer? I trow not!"

"'Tis nothing to me," replied the Earl; "for Master Knox was never friend of mine."

"Nor mine!" added Ormiston, with a furious oath. "He ever gave me the breadth of the causeway, as if there was contamination in the touch of my cloak; and so he, too, can league with murderers—with jackmen and men-at-arms, eh?"

"Doubtless," replied Balfour with a sneer, "when, as he hath it, 'God raiseth them up to slay those whom the kirk hateth.' Since Rizzio's death, Morton, Lindesay, Ochiltree,

* At this date, the calumnies recorded by Buchanan were yet uncirculated. M. le Guyon and *Blackwood* expressly state David Rizzio to have been an *old man*.

Fawdounside, and others, have been exiles in England; the Catholic lords are again in the ascendant, and want but the appearance of Huntly and yourself at Court (united by other ties, as I have no doubt you soon will be) to crush by the strong hand, and perhaps for ever, those dark and dour-visaged Protestants. God's murrain on their long prayers and Geneva cloaks! for the sound of one and sight of the other gives me a fit of the spleen. But we have had enough of these matters—fill thy wine-bicker, noble Bothwell. Here's to black-eyed Jane of Huntly—drink, Ormiston, a fair carouse to the Lady of Hailes and Bothwell-hall!”

The Earl drank his wine in silence, and black Hob did so too, twirling his moustache the while, with his eyes half-closed by a leer.

“Odsbody! thou receivest this sentiment rather coldly!” said Sir Gilbert, setting down his horn with surprise.

“Thou forgettest there is this lady of Norway,” said the Earl.

“By St. Magnus! dost thou speak of letting thy gay lemane stand in the way of thine advancement to an eminence more glorious than ever Scottish subjects (save this lordling of Lennox) attained to? for thou and Huntly shall govern the realm, and the King and Queen will be but as painted puppets in thy hands; for the memory of Rizzio's bloody corpse, and that night of horror in the turret-chamber, will ever rise in Mary's mind as a barrier between thee and the exiles. Bethink thee! Thou hast many a wrong to revenge on the tribe that have triumphed in thine absence.”

“True, true!” replied Bothwell, with a louring eye; “but I have promised to this girl—”

“Not marriage! thou wouldst not say that!” laughed Sir Gilbert. “No, no! thou wouldst not be such a jack-a-lent (the blood rushed to the Earl's brow). But if thou fearest that Jane Gordon should hear of thy wandering fancies, why, bethink thee that Noltland is a strong castle, and that the rocks of this islet are washed by the deep salt sea. It would form a prison for the giants of Amadis, then how much more for one poor fragile girl!”

Whatever Bothwell thought of this insidious advice, or how much it coincided with the ideas that were then beginning to obtrude on his mind, we shall not say, but now return to Konrad.

He sat by the lonely shore, and its waves rolled up the shelving rock to his feet. He was in a waking dream, and felt neither the cold night wind or the misty spray of the sea as they blew on his fevered cheek. A sense of desolation pressed heavily on his heart, and it was not unmingled with a desire of vengeance on Bothwell. But Konrad was alike brave and generous, and the sentiments of jealousy and rage, that made him at one time grip the haft of his Norwegian knife, were almost immediately stilled by those of a gentler nature—pity and commiseration.

He now felt both for Anna, and felt acutely, though she had so heedlessly and ruthlessly cast him from her heart and remembrance. Chance had thrown them together on a foreign shore, and feeling, he knew not why, an intense distrust of the sincerity of that gay and glittering noble, whom she had preferred to an earlier and better lover, he resolved to watch over her safety and interests in secrecy, and with the affection of a friend; for he now deemed her no longer worthy of a deeper sentiment of regard; and yet withal he felt that he loved her still—yea passionately, as of old, though hope was dead for ever.

The moon arose at the distant horizon, and cold and pale its light fell on the restless ocean; clearly and brightly the stars sparkled in the dark blue sky, and at times the red wavering streamers of the north shot across it.

High and grim in all its baronial pride and feudal strength, the embattled keep of the Scottish stronghold towered above the slimy rocks—slimy with drifting spray and drenched seaweed. Three long flakes of yellow lustre streamed out into the night from the grated windows of the hall. One starlike ray shone from a chamber in the guest-row, and long and wistfully Konrad gazed at it, for he believed it was the apartment of Anna, and his conjecture was right.

Young and enthusiastic, he felt that many a vision of future fame and happiness had perished now, and passed away for ever, with the passion that had cherished such dreams—dreams that arise only in the noon of life and love.

The moon went down into the dark blue ocean; the diamond stars faded one by one, and the first rays of the early morning began to play upon the floating clouds, to tinge the east with orange hues, and tip the turrets of Noltland with warm light; but Konrad was still seated by the murmuring sea.

All sense of time and place had been forgotten, or were merged in one idea.

And that idea was Anna.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SEPARATION.

"I HAVE resolved!" exclaimed the Earl, breaking a long silence, as he walked to and fro with Ormiston on the bartisan of Noltland next morning. "With a prospect before me so magnificent—the attainment of the administration, the civil and military power on one hand, the sweets of successful rivalry and vengeance on the other! Oh! I would be worse than mad to forego it, by marring my union with the sister of Huntly, and for what? This love, so suddenly conceived, and for a foreign girl!"

"Cocknails! but now thou speakest like a man of mettle!" growled Hob through his coal-black beard.

"If," said the Earl musingly; "if I could love her as I once loved one who—pshaw! why these old thoughts? Anna is not my first love; and have I not felt how feeble, how falling, how sickly, have been the sentiments entertained for all who have succeeded *her*?"

"Then thou wilt sail—"

"From Westera; and, like Æneas, leaving my Dido behind me."

"Right! Sir Gilbert shewed me letters from Lethington the secretary, and his brother Sir James of Pittendriech, wherein they state that her Majesty is most anxious for your return, and daily groweth more weary of her husband; that Huntly (the moment thou art fairly espoused to his sister) will strike some vigorous blow to lay for ever prostrate the adherents of Morton and of Moray."

"What a jack-a-lent! what a blockhead I have been, to give way thus to my passion for the niece of Rosenkrantz! I have undone myself, and so may mar a thousand giant schemes of triumph and ambition."

"I thought that sense would return when perhaps too late; but the affair is not irredeemable."

"Ha!—how?"

"A marriage tie blessed by yon mad priest cannot be very indissoluble, and the damsel may easily be got rid of."

"Dog of hell!" exclaimed the Earl furiously, "wouldst thou counsel me to murder her?"

"Nay," replied Hob sternly; "may God forgive thee the thought, so freely as I do this foul offence; but as Sir Gilbert offers to keep thy troublesome lemane, let him do so a-God's name. He is a gay man and a gallant, this old Balfour—we know him well; and, cock and pie! I warrant he will soon find means to turn this damsel's sorrow into joy."

At this probability a darker frown gathered on the brow of Bothwell; for, though half tired of Anna, and wholly repenting of his intrigue with her, he felt a pang at the idea of another supplanting his image in her heart.

"Thou art but a cold-blooded and iron-hearted mosstrooper, Hob," said he; "one inured to rapine and cruelty; nursed and nurtured among wilds and morasses, and thirty years of incessant feud and foray, stouthrief and bloodshed, and cannot judge of my feelings in this matter. I will myself see Anna, and break the matter to her, bid her adieu, and will meet thee here, if thou tarriest for me."

"See her, and be lost! one smile—one tender word—a few tears—will seal thy fate; and while thou playest the lover and the laggard here at Westeray, Morton, Lindesay, and their allies, aided by the English Queen, regain place and power, and reverse thy pardon and recal. Yonder lieth the *Fleur-de-lys*, with her canvas flapping in the friendly gale, that streams her pennons towards the Caithness coast. Be wise—be wary; away, and see not Anna again!"

"Trust me, Ormiston. In my youth I was the plaything of a proud, a cold, and calculating beauty; the slave of her charms and caprice in hall and bower—the upholder of her name and loveliness amid the dust and blood of the battle and tiltyard; but these follies have passed with the years and the passion that produced them; and now thou shalt see, that, like *that woman*, I can be cold as ice, and impassible as marble, when my interest jars with my love. In half an hour I will meet thee here; till then, adieu!"

One of the numerous boys, who fed like the dogs on the offals at the hall table of the great island baron, conducted the Earl

to the chamber of Anna. He was little, but strong and active as a deer. His whole attire was a kilt of brown stuff belted about him, a sealskin vest, and the leathern fillet confining the masses of his thick red hair, which, from the hour of his birth, a comb had never touched. Leading the way, he sprang like a squirrel up the steps of the great stair, his bare and sinewy legs taking three steps at a time.

The space and magnificence of the staircase made the Earl pause as he ascended, notwithstanding the bitter thoughts that oppressed him. The great stone column upon which the steps turn is a yard in diameter, and has a capital decorated with a statue of the Bishop of Orkney, Thomas de Tulloch. The nature of the times of which we write was evinced by the architecture of this grand stair; for at every turn of the ascent there are concealed loopholes pointing inwards, to gall the foe who might penetrate thus far; while, at the summit, there is still remaining the guard-room, where five or six islesmen, who formed the body-guard of Balfour, clad in their shirts of mail, and armed with bow and battle-axe, lay stretched on the stone benches dozing listlessly, like sleepy dogs.

The Earl stood within the apartment where Anna had passed the night; it was wainscoted with fir-wood, and on the centre of each pannel was carved a quaint device, the design of some rude genius of the Orcadian Isles. These were principally of a religious nature, and the hands and feet of our Saviour, pierced by the nail-holes and encircled by a crown of thorns, appeared alternately with the *otter-head* of Balfour, and satyr-like visages that grinned from bunches of gothic leaves. The stone fireplace was surmounted by a bishop's mitre, and a fire of driftwood was still smouldering on the hearth.

Christina, who had been watching her mistress, retired on the entrance of the Earl.

He approached the bed where Anna, still oppressed by the illness and lassitude consequent to her voyage, was reposing and slumbering soundly, unaware that her lover was bending over her.

Raised upon a dais, and having a heavy wooden canopy supported by four grotesque columns, the bed resembled a gothic tomb rather than a couch, and Anna might have passed for a statue, as her face and bosom were white as Parian marble. On each cheek her hair fell in heavy braids, which glowed like bars

of gold when the rays of the morning sun streamed through the embrasured casement on her placid face.

More than usual was revealed of a bosom that, in its whiteness and roundness, was like that face, surpassing beautiful. The colour came and went in the cheek of the Earl, and he became irresolute as he gazed upon her. He sighed deeply, and, animated by a sudden tenderness, pressed his lip to her cheek; she awoke and twined her arms around him.

"My dear Lord!" said she, in a faint voice, "so thou art come to me again!"

"I have come, Anna, but to bid thee farewell." Her large eyes dilated with sudden alarm and grief.

"I told thee, Anna, that in Orkney we might have to separate for a time, ere I could convey thee to my household and my home. The wind is blowing right across the stormy Frith toward the mainland of Scotland, and though love cries ho! my skipper is urgent, and still more so is stern necessity. Farewell for a time—for a brief time, sweet Anna, I must leave thee," continued the Earl, kissing her repeatedly to pacify her.

Her beauty was very alluring, and until that moment he knew not how deep was his passion for her.

"In that busy world of turmoil and intrigue on which thou art about to re-enter—I will be forgotten. Thou mayest not return to me, and I—I will—"

"What?"

"Die!"

"Speak not, think not thus, dearest Anna!" replied Bothwell, who felt his resolution wavering, though the thoughts of ambition and the taunts of Ormiston urged him on the path he had commenced. "We must separate—but we must meet again."

"Well, be it so!" she said, bending her eyes that were blinded with tears upon him; "but O, Bothwell! thou art dearer to me than life, and knowest all that I have sacrificed for thee,—home—friends—myself—everything—"

"True—true, Anna;" he was touched to the soul by her manner and accent.

"Then leave me not—but take me with thee. I will go happily in the meanest disguise thou mayest assign me—O, I will never be discovered!"

"It may not be, Anna; it is impossible. By St. Paul! I tell thee it is impossible at present."

"In the confidence of thy love I have been dreaming a pleasant dream, and now, perhaps, am waking from it. Wilt thou love me in thine absence as thou dost now?"

"After my solemn espousal of thee before that holy hermit—canst thou doubt it?" rejoined the Earl, in a voice that faltered with very shame, though to Anna it seemed that grief had rendered it tremulous in tone. The supposed emotion inspired her with sudden confidence in him, and she said—

"Go—and never again will I suspect thy love; but oh! when wilt thou return to me?"

"By Yule-tide, dear Anna, if I am in life;" and, kissing her once again, he hurried from her presence like one who had been guilty of a crime, and—returned no more!

"Oh! how base, how ignoble is this duplicity!" he exclaimed on rejoining Hob Ormiston, who with folded arms had been leaning on the parapet, whistling the "Hunts of Cheviot" to wile away the time. "She weeps so bitterly at my departure, and speaks so trustingly of my return, that my heart is wrung with the misery my damnable deceit and criminal ambition will bring upon her."

"Whew! yet she cared not to deceive one who loved her earlier, longer, and better than thee."

"True," replied the Earl; he became silent for a moment, and while the idea of her ever having loved another caused a pang of mortification in his breast, it was mingled with a coldness from which he drew a consolation for the part he was about to act.

"By coek and pie!" continued Hob, pursuing the advantage his sophistry had gained; "ten thousand women should never stand in my path. I never pursued love so fast as to lose a stirrup by the way; and what the foul fiend matters it whether thou weddest Jane Gordon or not? Thou canst still come and see thy Norwegian sometimes, and I warrant ye Sir Gilbert will prevent her from feeling thine absence much. He is a courtier of jolly King James the Fifth; and *he*, as thou knowest, kept a dame at every hunting lodge to manage the household. Ha! nay, nay, do not chafe; 'tis but marrying the Lady Jane, and handfasting the Lady Anna; and methinks I need not cite examples among our nobility and knighthood."

"In the days when I was young, generous, and unspotted in honour and faith, I was alternately the tool and the play-

thing of a woman, of that female fiend, Catherine of Medicis, who saw my love for—pshaw! since then I have grown wiser. I have, as we say at chess, turned the tables upon the sex, and view them merely as the objects of my pleasure—the tools of my ambition. Yet I feel that I am on the eve of taking a step that, however cruel, must make or mar my fortune.”

“Fortune! defy her, and the fickle jade will favour thee. I love a bold fellow, who, with his helmet on his brow and a whinger by his side, becomes the artificer of his own fortune.”

“Ah! could we but have a glimpse through that thick veil that ever involves the future. Hast thou ever read Cicero?”

“Nay, thank God! I never could read aught save my missal, and, without spelling, very little of that; but since 1560, when missal and mass went out of fashion together, I have done nothing in that way. But this book—”

“’Tis a man, Marcus Tullius Cicero, an illustrious Roman.”

“A sorcerer, by his name, I doubt not; well, and what said he?”

“There is a fine passage in his works, wherein he speaks of the capability of seeing effects in their *causes*; and supposes that Priam, and Pompey, and Cæsar, had each laid before them their pages in the great book of fate, in the noonday of their prosperity—ere the first fell with his Troy, ere the second was defeated at Pharsalia, and the third perished by the dagger of Brutus. But I warrant thou canst not fathom this.”

“No—an it had been a winepot I might; but, cock and pie! ’tis all Greek to me. See! yonder cometh Sir Gilbert from the shore to announce that our ship is ready; and so, oncè more, my Lord, let us seaward, ho!”

The sun was setting that evening on the Firth of Westera. Its impetuous waves, that rolled in saffron and purple, broke in golden breakers crested with silver surf upon the shining rocks. The distant peaks of Rousay were bathed in yellow light, but, mellowed by distance, the sea lay cold and blue around their bases. The sky was clear and cloudless, and the purity of the atmosphere imparted many beautiful tints to the ocean, that rolled its restless tides around these lonely isles. Like a white bird floating on the distant azure, afar off at the horizon’s verge, a sail was visible from the keep of Noltland about sunset. It was the *Fleur-de-lys*, that had borne Bothwell away from the arms of Anua Rosenkrantz. The whole day, with tear-swollen

eyes, she had watched its course through the Firth of Westeray; now it had diminished to a speck in the distance, and ere the sun dipped into the Atlantic, had disappeared behind the fertile Isle of Eglise-oy, where then, as now, the pyramidal spire of the chapel of Saint Magnus rose above the verdant holms, as a landmark to the fishers of the isles.

As slowly the sail vanished round that dim and distant promontory, a low cry almost of despair burst from Anna, and she clung to the weeping Christina. The waiting-woman wept from mere sympathy; but the grief of her mistress (sudden, like all her impulses) was of that violent kind which can only find relief in tears and loud ejaculations.

Near her stood one of Sir Gilbert's retainers, clad in a long shirt of mail, such as was then common in the Orcades; he was leaning on his long axe, and regarding her attentively through the horizontal slit in his *salade*, a species of helmet with an immovable visor which completely concealed the face; but beneath the impassable front of that iron casque, were features distorted by the grief and anguish that wrung the wearer's generous heart. He was Konrad, who, thus disguised, had the mortification of beholding the wildness of her grief for another.

Often he made a motion, as if to approach her, and as often retired; for though on one hand the most sincere pity urged him to comfort her, the invidious whispers of anger and disdain on the other, together with the necessity of preserving his incognito, withheld him. And there, scarcely a lance's length apart, were the lover and his idol, with the night descending on their sorrows.

From Rousay's hills, and on the distant sea, the sunlight died away. The Firth of Westeray turned from saffron to purple, and from purple to the darkest blue, in whose vast depths were reflected the star-studded firmament, till the moon arose, and then once more its waters rolled in light of the purest silver; and each breaker, as its impetuous wrath was poured upon the bluffs of basalt, fell back into the ocean a shower of brilliants.

CHAPTER XV.

DOUBT AND DESPAIR.

YULE-TIDE came—and passed away.

Three months rolled on, and in that time Anna heard no tidings of Bothwell.

Those who, like her, have waited in all the agony of anxiety and love, degenerating into fear and doubt, can alone know how long those weary months appeared.

In that lonely island her amusements were few. Kind-hearted, honest, and bluff in manner, Sir Gilbert Balfour, though having been something of a courtier in his youth, had gradually acquired much of that rude austerity, with which the Reformation had impressed the manners of the Scottish people, and, being unable to converse with his fair prisoner either in French or Norse, he soon abandoned in despair any attempts to soothe her melancholy, either by signs or condolences offered in the Scottish tongue, which was quite unknown to her.

She soon grew tired of watching the sails that now and then appeared in the narrow strait between Rousay and Westeray. At first she had been wont to hail them with delight, and to watch their approach with a beating heart, full of hope that each successive one might be *his* returning to her; but hope and exultation died away together, when the ship passed on towards her Scandinavian home; and then she thought of old Sir Erick Rosenkrantz, sitting lonely in his hall at Bergen; and bitter were the tears she wept, at the memory of that kind old face she might never behold again.

The walrus and the sea-dog, that at times arose in droves from the waves, with their round heads breasting the foam; the vast whale that floundered in the shallows, and blew clouds of water in the air; the shoals of finless porpoises, that rushed through the surge like a flock of ocean devils, failed, after a time, to interest or amuse her. Week succeeded week; there were days of storm, when the grey clouds and the white mists came down from the Arctic circle; when the waves roared and foamed through the narrow strait, and the lightning flashed afar off among the heath-clad hills of Rousay—days of cloudless sunshine, or of listless calm, succeeded each other; and

nothing marked the time, which passed by unmarked, even as the wind that swept over the pathless ocean—but there came no word of Bothwell. The spring of 1566 approached, and all hope in the bosom of Anna began to die away.

Konrad still preserved his incognito most rigidly; but though life seemed to stagnate on the little Isle of Westera, and in its great but dreary baronial castle, the world beyond it was busy as ever. One night a messenger arrived from the lieutenant-governor of Kirkwall, bearing despatches for Sir Gilbert, who, without taking leave of Anna, but merely giving strict orders to his bailie, that “she was to be kept in sure ward, and treated with every respect,” had thrown himself on board a small crayer, and sailed for the mainland of Orkney.

Then passing fishermen brought rumours of civil war and bloodshed—of battles fought and castles stormed; and Anna, when she heard the name of Bothwell, looked anxiously in the faces of those around her, to read in their expression those tidings she was dying with eagerness to learn, but which it was impossible for her to gather from the barbarous, and half Gaëlic, half Pictish, jargon of the speakers.

The festival of Easter passed away—summer drew on; yet Bothwell did not come, and then the heart of poor Anna began to sicken within her.

The evening was declining drearily, as many others had declined, on Westera.

A prey to the deepest dejection, Anna reclined on a stone seat in an angle of the battlement, through an embrasure of which she was watching the setting sun. Christina sat near her on the steps of this stone sofa, and her eyes were anxiously fixed on the pallid face of her mistress, whose fine but humid eyes were bent on the distant horizon; but their expression was dreamy, sad, and vacant. The eyes of another were fixed on her, with an intensity of which she was unaware; and indeed she knew not that anyone was near save her female attendant.

Leaning against the battlement, and but a few paces distant, stood Konrad of Saltzberg, clad in the same long shirt of mail, and wearing the same salade that have already been described. For more than an hour he had been regarding Anna as a lover alone could have regarded her; but she was thinking only of her absent Earl, and watching the passing ships.

Many had been visible that day; for the vessels of Elizabeth, the English queen, were then sailing to the shores of Iceland, where her people had been permitted by the Danish king to fish for cod. The sun was dipping into the Atlantic, and, when half his circle was hidden by the horizon, the crimsoned waves became as an ocean of blushing wine, but their breakers were glittering in green and gold where they burst on the rocky beach of the isle.

The sun set; his rays died away from land and sea; the pink that edged the changing clouds, and the flush that reddened the water, grew paler and yet more pale, and the stars began to twinkle in the yet sunny blue of the sky. The last white sail, diminished to the size of a nautilus, had faded away in the distance, and Anna covered her face with her hands, and wept; from beneath the lappets of her little velvet cap, her bright hair fell forward in masses, and Konrad, though he saw not her tears, felt all his sympathy and his old love glow within him.

Resolving at all risks to discover himself, he removed his salade and advanced towards her. Anna raised her head at the clink of the shirt of mail, and, starting up, gazed upon him with astonishment while clinging to the parapet, for her strength almost left her. She would have become paler were it possible; but she was already so colourless, that death could not have made her more so.

Konrad expected a greater ebullition of fear, or joy, or astonishment, at his presence and safety; but Anna, who imagined he had merely expatriated himself from Aggerhuis, according to his threat at their last interview, expressed only the latter emotion in her features; and Konrad could not help feeling a little piqued, at her supposed indifference to the dangers he had run, and the watery grave he had so miraculously escaped.

"Konrad," she faltered—"thou here!"

"Anna, dear Anna!" exclaimed the unhappy young man, deeply moved by the sound of her voice, which, like an old and beloved air, stirred the inmost chords of his heart. "I did not expect to hear your lips again utter my name so tenderly."

He covered his eyes with his hand, and then the girl in turn was moved; she laid her hand gently on his arm, but he trembled so much that she withdrew it.

"Poor Konrad! you seem indeed changed; your eyes are hollow, and your cheek—it is very pale!"

"I have endured great grief; God alone knoweth how much agony has been concentrated in a heart that felt too narrow to contain it."

"I do pity thee, Konrad!"

"It is too late now. Thou didst love me once, Anna, and I feel bitterly how cold a substitute is pity. Oh! thou alone wert the link that bound me to the world; the link is snapped, and I am very desolate now!"

Anna sighed. She would have said *forgive me*; but her pride forbade it.

"The memory of hopes that are blighted, and wishes that were futile, presses heavily on me now," continued Konrad, whose brave spirit seemed to be completely broken; "and at times, I feel nothing but despair."

"Ah, Konrad!" she replied, with a sickly attempt to smile, "in a few years we learn to laugh at the love of our youth, just as we do at an old-fashioned dress."

"With some it may be so, and 'tis a sad reflection; but, oh Anna! (pardon me repeating that well-loved name as of old) in all my dreams of the future, I had so entwined our lives, and thoughts, and feelings, into one—I had so long viewed thee as my—my wife—that"—

"I must listen no more to this," said Anna, turning away with a reddening cheek.

"Thou art angry with me; but there was a time—and hast thou forgotten it quite?—when that word *wife* fell otherwise on thine ear. I trifle, lady. I have tidings to tell thee."

"I will not—I cannot—listen."

"For Heaven's sake and your own, hear me!"

"This is alike sinful and insulting—this from the captain of my uncle's archers! Leave me, Konrad of Saltzberg!"

"By my past grief, by my blighted hope and present sorrow, I conjure thee, Anna, to hear me! I would speak to you of this man"—

"My husband?"

"The Lord of Bothwell," said Konrad, with a smile of scorn.

"Hah!—well!" continued Anna in a breathless voice, while all her pride and petulance became immediately merged in intense eagerness.

"Thou hast not heard from him since his departure for the court of Scotland?"

"No, not one message hath come to Noltland, at least so sayeth the castellan."

"The castellan hath lied!" replied Konrad, with sparkling eyes; "he hath heard daily, and knows that this false Earl, whom he is now going to join and assist, hath been espoused, with every magnificence, to the sister of the Lord Huntly."

"And I—I—" gasped Anna.

"Thou art a captive for life in this island castle."

Anna clasped her hands passionately above her head, and would have fallen backward had not Konrad sprung to her assistance; but, unable to trust himself with the part of upholding her almost inanimate form, he seated her gently, and hung over her with the utmost tenderness.

"Konrad," she said, with pale and quivering lips, but firm and tearless earnestness; "thou, thou didst never deceive me in word, in deed, or thought—say, how didst thou learn this?"

"How, matters not—'tis the sad verity."

"Thou triflest!" she said with sudden passion, and stamping her foot, while her eyes filled with tears, and she endeavoured to control the unutterable anguish that was expressed in every feature. "From whom, I demand, heardst thou these evil tidings?"

"From Hans Knuber, Lady Anna," replied Konrad, lowering his voice. "He trades, as thou knowest, with certain udallers of Shetland and Orkney, and this night his little crayer, the Skottefruin (for so has he named her to please the Scots), is about to sail for the river Clyde. The night is closing—if thou wouldst escape, an hour will set thee free."

"I do not, Oh no! I cannot believe this tale; yet I will go with Hans—and whither? Is not anywhere better than this island prison? Yes—land me once in Scotland, and I will soon make my way to Bothwell."

"Thou art perhaps without money, and knowest not the Scottish tongue."

"Love and despair will sustain me without the first, and I shall soon acquire the second. How I will upbraid, how I will implore him; but he cannot have deceived me—Hans must be mistaken."

"But if he is not?" said Konrad, piqued at the excess of her regard for another.

"Then I will throw myself at the feet of his sovereign; she is a woman, and, feeling as a woman, will do me justice."

"Wherever thou goest, Anna, permit me to be thy protector; and I will go, for am I not wedded to thee in spirit—thy brother, thy friend, if I cannot be thy lover? Unhappy one! thou dost now experience for another the pangs that I endured for thee; thou who didst betray me, art now in thy turn betrayed. But think not, gentle one, that I upbraid thee," he continued, on seeing that she wept bitterly, "for now I am thy brother, Anna, since God denies me to be more; and by his blessed name I swear that I will lead, protect, and avenge thee! Come—be once again the daughter of stout old Svend of Aggerhuis, the conqueror of Lubeck—be once again a Norwegian!"

Like a ray of sunlight across a cold sky, a faint and sickly smile spread over Anna's face, and she kissed the hand of Konrad, who was deeply moved by the humility of the action.

"In an hour the night will be dark; have all prepared for flight, and then I will meet thee here. Meanwhile I go to Hans."

"Ah! if Hans should be mistaken; and Bothwell returning find me gone."

"Honest Hans is *not* mistaken; for Bothwell's marriage is known throughout all Scotland and the isles. Bethink thee, Anna! Hans' ship is bound for the Clyde, a river of that country, and he tells me that Bothwell's princely dwelling overlooks that very water; thus, with him, thou goest direct to the castle-gates of thy deceiver."

"Enough! enough! Come triumph or death, despair or joy, I will go with thee. Away to Hans; bid him hasten our departure; he knows how well I can reward him when we are at home in dear Norway. In an hour from this time, Konrad, I will meet thee here."

As she hurried away, accompanied by her attendant, who had withdrawn during this painful interview, Konrad gazed wistfully after her, and, clasping his hands, convulsively muttered—

"Oh, Anna! by what fatality did I ever love thee?"

That night the moon shone brightly upon the strait of Westeraay, and the snow-white sails of the Norwegian ship were bellying in the breeze that curled the impetuous waves. Above, was the blue and star-studded sky; below was the shining sea. Afar off, the full-orbed moon was rising like a silver shield from the ocean, and between lay a black speck—it was the keep of Noltland.

On their lee lay the isle of Eglise-oy, with its green holms and yellow sands shining in the merry light of the summer moon, that turned to silver and emerald the waves that murmured on its pebbled shore.

A bell was heard to toll in the distance ; its tone was deep and solemn, as it swung in the vaulted spire of old St. Magnus' church, that crowned a rocky headland. It was the signal of nocturnal prayer ; for in those remote isles God was still worshipped as of old—the new creed of the Reformers, the clang of their hammers and levers, had been as yet unheard.

The outline of the old gothic church, with its solid tower and pointed spire, stood darkly out in bold relief upon the sea-beat promontory ; the stars gleamed through the painted windows of its vaulted aisles ; beneath, the waves were rolling in light, and the deep tones of the *nocturnal* bell were mingled with their hollow murmur.

Hans doffed his Elsinore cap, and prayed for the intercession of the friend and patron of the Orcadian mariner, Saint Tradewell of Papay ; while Anna, in attendance to the distant call to prayer, knelt down on the deck with her crucifix and rosary.

Konrad was beside her.

She prayed intently for herself and for Bothwell, but Konrad offered up his orisons for her alone.

CHAPTER XVI.

BLANTYRE PRIORY.

AN evening of June was closing upon the “apple-bowers” of Clydesdale and the woods of Bothwellhaugh, when two pedestrians, a male and a female, pursued the ancient Roman way, that by a high and narrow bridge of one arch, which had been constructed by the warriors of Agricola, spanned the stream named the South Calder, a tributary of the Clyde. Fair in complexion, and athletic in figure, the young man was attired somewhat like a lowland yeoman. He wore a plain black breastplate and headpiece, for at that time in Scotland, no man ever ventured beyond his own door without armour ; he carried a sealskin wallet and pouch, and was armed with a sword, dag-

ger, and quarterstaff. His breeches and hose were of coarse red sarcenet, his gloves and boots of yellow buff.

He partly led and partly supported the companion of his journey, a young lady, whose unusually pale complexion had been rendered yet more pallid by fatigue; but her velvet hood being well drawn forward, almost concealed her features. Though light and graceful, her figure was veiled in one of those ample plaids of purple and blue check which were then (and for two hundred years after) so common in the Lowlands of Scotland. She wore it over her head, and pinned under the chin, from whence it fell over her shoulders, and enveloped her whole form. Her white gloves were fringed with black lace, and her wrists and arms, where visible, were remarkably white and delicate.

Konrad and Anna—for doubtless the reader has recognised them—were wearied and covered with dust, having travelled on foot from the old Stockwell bridge of Glasgow. The commercial capital of the West was then but a small trading town, clustered round the great church, which, four hundred years before, the pious David had founded on the bank of the Molendinar burn.

There the crayer of Hans Knuber had anchored, and was discharging her cargo of tar and stockfish, for which Hans received in exchange cottons, and silks, and tanned leather, which he sold to the best advantage in the cities on the Baltic; and there Anna heard the sequel of Konrad's tidings, and the confirmation of Bothwell's falsehood beyond a doubt.

They found themselves in Clydesdale almost penniless; but, rough and turbulent though the times were, neither in baron's hall nor peasant's cottage, were food, fire, and shelter, refused to the wayfarer or the unfortunate; and, in the assumed character of French travellers on their way to court, to seek the patronage of Le Crocque, the ambassador of Charles IX., or the Marquis d'Elbœuff, they had reached the district of Bothwell with comparative ease and safety. Though the mass of the people, under terror of the act of 1555, "Anent speaking evill of the Maist Christian Kingis subjectis," and that of the following year, which defined the naturalisation of the French in Scotland, treated all strangers with respect, Anna and Konrad were frequently reviled at wayside hostels as "massmongers and idolaters, worshippers of Baal, and followers of the shavelings of hell!" for Anna had the temerity and enthusiasm to wear openly on her bosom, that emblem against which, by word and

deed, the preachers of the Reformation had poured forth their wrath and fury—a crucifix.

Evening was closing, and the woods of Bothwellhaugh were throwing their darkening shadows on the winding Calder. The foliage was in all the vivid green of July, and the perfume of the summer blossoms from the groves of apple-trees loaded the balmy air. The day had been one of intense heat; there was not a breath of wind upon the uplands, every leaf was still, and nothing was stirring save the busy gnats, that revolved in swarms where the sunlight pierced the leafy vistas.

So still was the atmosphere, that nothing was heard save the gurgle of the glittering stream, or the hum of the mountain bees as they floated over the grass, and sought the wild violets and pansies that grew in the dewy shades.

The sunlight died away along the deep glen sides, that were fringed with leafy woodlands; on trees bending with foliage and fruit, on the white-walled and moss-roofed cottages, with their light smoke curling through the coppice, on the river that glided past, placidly in one part, hoarse and brawling between its scaured banks in another, on rocks tufted with purple heather, or yellow with ripening corn, fell the dying sunlight, blending all with hazy softness, till the last rays faded from the tree-tops and the castle turrets, that overlooked them; and then, as the blue sky became veiled by dun clouds, which the set sun edged with the most brilliant golden light, the air became dense and oppressive, and a dusky crimson tinged the whole woodland scenery with the hue of blood. Perched on its rifted rock, the old square tower of Clelland turned to brick red; the Calder flowed below like a stream of purple wine, and the beechwood copse became like a grove of the red-leaved ilex.

The atmosphere soon became darker; a few heavy drops of rain plashed on the dusty causeway of the Roman road, and spread wide circles on the wooded stream that flowed beneath the bridge; the tops of the lofty trees were tossed, as the wind arose, and the summer thunder rumbled among the green and russet hills that overlook the fruitful valley of the Clyde.

“A storm is gathering, Anna!” said Konrad, gazing tenderly on her pale features; “and thou art growing faint and weary. Overtasked as it has been, thy little strength is completely exhausted; let me beseech thee once again to pause. There is a tower yonder that overhangs the river; and there, I doubt not,

due hospitality will be gladly extended to two poor and unfriended foreigners !”

“No—no ! On—on !” muttered Anna.

“We are, I believe, yet far from our destination ; and, ere it is reached, thou wilt assuredly die of fatigue !”

“Then, O God ! grant that it may be at Bothwell’s castle gate !” said Anna, bursting into a passion of tears ; “that the sight of my silent corpse might upbraid him with his perfidy. Assure me that he will behold me lying dead upon his threshold, and I will yield up my soul without a sigh. Life hath no longer any charm for me !”

“Nor for me !” murmured Konrad ; but how different was the tone ! The girl spoke in all the bitterness of rage ; the young man with the accents of desolation. Anna read the emotion in his eyes, as she glanced hurriedly and pityingly upon him ; and, repressing her own grief, still continued to totter forward. The feebleness of her steps became more and more apparent ; but her spirit was strong and indomitable.

As they descended into the bosky woodlands, the red lightning began to gleam behind the trunks of the distant trees, and the Calder, as it jarred between ledges of rock, became covered with white foam. These signs of a coming tempest caused them to hasten on, and with both hands the trembling Anna clung to Konrad’s arm. The woods grew dark as the plumes of a bear-se, and the starless sky was crowded with masses of inky vapour ; but there was one dense cloud that came up from the westward, and in it the whole fury of the storm seemed to be concentrated. Onward it came, laying the corn flat to the earth, while the strong trees bent like willows beneath its sulphureous breath ; for it was charged with all the electric fluid of the summer storm.

Konrad paused, and looked upward.

For a moment the aspect of the heavens was magnificent !

Forth from the bosom of that dark cloud broke one broad flash of forky lightning, resplendent, green, and lurid. For an instant it lit the whole firmament, and the earth beneath it, revealing the tossing forests and deep broad waters of Clyde, which was covered with snow-white foam, and poured on between its steep and wooded banks, making one bold sweep round Bothwell’s dark red towers, that rose above them in massive magnificence.

In strong outline, tower and turret stood forth against the flaming sky, the lightning seeming to play among their summits, and all the leaves of Bothwell's blooming bank gleamed like filigree-work—but for an instant, and then all became darkness.

Another flash, brighter than the first, revealed the opposite bank of the stream, and the ruins of Blantyre Priory. Brightly, for a moment, pinnacle and pointed window, buttress and battlement, gleamed in the phosphorescent light—but to fade away, and then terrifically the thunder rolled along the beautiful and winding valley of the Clyde.

All became still; and though the foliage was agitated, the wind had passed away. Nothing was heard save the rush of the river and the ceaseless hiss of the drenching rain, as noisily and heavily it poured down on the broad summer leaves.

Stunned for a moment by the thunder-peal, Konrad, in the confusion of the time, had thrown an arm round Anna as if to protect her, while she in turn clung to him convulsively for support; and even in that moment of consternation, the warm embrace of that loved bosom sent through his a thrill of pain and delight.

The thick foliage still protected them from the rain; but the necessity of seeking other shelter became immediately apparent, for Anna, exhausted by terror and fatigue, was almost speechless. Konrad supported her up the ascent, which is crowned by the ruins of Blantyre Priory; and there, in that desolate place which the lightning had revealed to them, he found a place of shelter under the arch of a vault, where the ivy clung and the wallflower flourished, for the place was utterly ruined. Seven years had elapsed since the sons of rapine and reformation had been there.

The gloom of the ruins impressed Konrad with a horror that he could scarcely repress; for thick and fast on his glowing fancy came many a dark and terrible legend of the wild and frozen north—but the danger of Anna compelled him to think of other things.

The rain and the wind were over; the thunder had died away on the distant hills, and nothing was heard now but the rush of the adjacent stream and the patter of the heavy drops as they fell from the overcharged foliage on the flattened grass. Occasional stars gleamed through the pointed windows and shattered walls of the Priory, and the long creeping ivy waved mournfully

to and fro. The edifice was much dilapidated; for the sacrilegious builders of many a barn and cottage had torn the best stones from the places where they had rested for ages, and where, doubtless, the pious Alexander II. deemed they would remain for ever; now the wild-rose, the sweetbriar, and the mountain-ash grew thickly in the *hospitium*, where of old the sick were tended and the poor were fed—in the chapel aisles where the good had prayed and the dead of ages lay.

Anna had become almost insensible, and, from being animated by activity and energy, had become passive in spirit and supine in body. The change had affrighted Konrad; her pulses beat like lightning, and her hands and brow were burning. Gently, as if she had been a sick child, he laid her in a corner of that vaulted apartment, which appeared to have been a cellar of the Priory. There the strewn and crisped leaves of the last autumn lay thick and soft; and, thinking only of death, in her utter exhaustion of mind and body, she made no reply to his tender and reiterated inquiries.

Konrad adjusted her damp dress over her beautiful person, and, full of solicitude and anxiety, seated himself near her. He listened—her breath was becoming fainter and more rapid; excessive fatigue and over-excitement had evidently done their worst upon her tender frame.

“Oh, how thy hands burn!” said Konrad, as he took them in his with the fondness of other days. “Speak, Anna—for the love of mercy speak to me!”

“I am very pettish and ungracious,” she said faintly; “but forgive me, Konrad. I deserve not thy care—leave me to die; for God, I think, has deserted me!”

“Ah! speak not thus, Anna! God will never desert one so good—so gentle as thee. Hath he not led us to this chamber, where we are safe from the wind, and the rain, and the chill night-dew? But here thou canst not pass a night. The storm hath died away—one effort more—”

“I cannot rise, Konrad,” said Anna, in a breathless voice.

“Then I must fly for succour!”

“No, no! Oh, do not leave me! I will die of terror! There may be demons, and wolves, and bears in these Scottish woods as in those at home.”

“But thou hast thy piece of the blessed cross, Anna. I go but to wind my bugle for succour at the foot of the hill; and

surely some one in yonder castle by the river will hear and attend to me."

"Then hasten; for my heart is sickening, and my strength is failing fast with the fever that burns within me."

Konrad sprang to his feet in an agony of anxiety.

"O Bothwell, Bothwell!" said Anna; "my dear lord, may Heaven forgive thee, freely as I do, all the misery and suffering thou hast caused to this poor heart!"

These words fell like ice on the young man's heart, and he said hurriedly—

"Be of good cheer, and pray to thy patron, the mother of the virgin—I will bring thee succour anon."

"Konrad," said Anna, in her low, soft voice, "my words have stung thee, for thine accent is changed. Pardon me!" she added tremulously, "and remember that I, too, am desolate now. Dost thou cease to love me? Am not I thy sister, Konrad?"

"Thou art, indeed!" replied her lover, whose heart was crushed by his emotion; "and I regard thee with a love more pure and pitying than ever. I am thy friend, Anna—a lover no longer."

"Then, Konrad, kiss and forgive me, for I may die ere thou returnest."

Konrad trembled. A gush that cannot be described—sorrow, love, agony, and despair—swelled up in his breast on hearing this singular and artless request, and, stooping down, he pressed his lips to hers long and passionately.

It was the first time he had ever kissed her, and it was a strange salute.

Anna's lips were burning and parched—Konrad's were cold and quivering, while a palsy seemed to possess his heart; but he sprang from her side, vaulted over the ruined wall, and, giddy with the whirl of his thoughts, rushed down the hill to the margin of the river and wound his bugle furiously.

Deep, broad, and rapid, between its steep and beautifully wooded banks the noble Clyde was flowing at his feet, and the bright stars were twinkling in its depth. Afar off, at one end of the sylvan dell, the moon was rising red and fiery after the recent storm, and full on the imposing façade of the neighbouring castle fell its fitful gleam.

Flanked by two enormous circular towers of massive dark red

stone, it presented a bold front to the south, and overlooked the wooded declivity so famed in song as—

“Bothwell’s bank that bloom’d so fair,”

around which, like a great moat, the girdling Clyde made one bold sweep.

The area of this vast and princely fortress, where, in other years, the Norman knights of Aymer of Valence and the bonneted vassals of Archibald the Grim kept watch and wassail, occupies a space of two hundred and thirty feet, towering with its magnificent battlements above the river on one side, and overlooking a beautiful lawn on the other. It occupies the most prominent and picturesque locality amid all the scenery traversed by the Clyde.

Darkly in the fitful light loomed the tourelles of the keep and the ramparts of the Valence and Wallace towers, and darkly fell their giant shadows on the bosom of the starlit river. Amid its gloomy mass Konrad saw lights twinkling from windows strongly grated and deeply recessed in the thick walls ; but the gates were closed and the bridges up. *Now*—how different from then—

“The tufted grass lines Bothwell’s ancient hall,
The fox peeps cautious from the ruin’d wall ;
Where once proud Moray, Clydesdale’s ancient lord,
A mimic sovereign, held the festive board.”

Ignorant that the stately castle before him was the stronghold of his rival, again and again Konrad poured the shrill blasts of his ivory bugle to the gusty wind ; and, finding that he was unheard or unheeded by the inmates, his anxiety to procure aid for Anna would admit of no longer delay, and, heavily incumbered as he was with half-armour, he threw himself into the river, and, with his sword in his teeth, endeavoured to swim over. Though a strong, active, and practised swimmer, he no sooner found himself buffeting the fierce current of that rapid river than an invocation to God burst from his lips ; for he was swept away like a reed by the violence and impetuosity of the summer *speat*.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE COUNTESS OF BOTHWELL.

WITHIN the stateliest chamber of that stately castle sat James, Earl of Bothwell, and his countess Jane, the bride of a few months. The apartment was long and lofty; in the day-time it was lighted by six grated windows that overlooked Bothwell bank, but now it was lit by two gigantic gilded chandeliers of wax candles. The ceiling was of panelled oak, and the floor was of the same material, but lozenged, and minutely jointed. The walls were completely hung with tapestry (made by the Countess of old Earl Adam, who fell at Flodden), and represented on one side the "*Hunts of Cheviot*," so famed in ancient song; and on the other, the miracles of the blessed St. Bothan, the cousin and successor of St. Colme of Iona. The spaces between were filled up by gorgeous flower pieccs, and the armorial coats of the Earl's alliances on trees covered with shields; but chief of all appeared the blazon of the House of Hailes. Now little known, the arms of Bothwell are worth recording, as they appeared above the stone chimney of that apartment. *Gules* on a cheveron *argent*, two Scottish lions rending an English rose, (which had been the characteristic cognisance of Patrick Hepburn of Hailes at the great battle of Otterburn,) quartered *azure* with a golden ship; three cheverons on a field *crmine* for the lordship of Soulis, with a bend *azure* for Vauss, lord of Dirltoun. His shield was supported by two lions *gardant*, crested by a horse's head bridled, and bearing on an escroll the motto—

Accepte Tryste.

The whole of this gorgeous armorial blazon was upborne by a gilded anchor, significant of Bothwell's office as Lord High Admiral of Scotland and the Isles.

Though the season was summer, a fire burned on the marble hearth; for the stone chambers of those ancient dwellings were often cold and chilly. Two silver lamps, lighted with perfumed oil, and having each a golden tassel appended to them, hung on each side of the mantelpiece, by the same chains that, ten years before, had swung them before St. Bothan's shrine, in Blantyre

Priority. Their odour was mingled with that of the fresh flowers that, in vases of Italian glass, were piled upon the cabinets, and diffused a delightful fragrance through that noble apartment.

A wine vase, or flask of Venetian crystal, grained with gold, and of that peculiar fashion then very common in the dwellings of the Scottish noblesse, (so common, indeed, that the Regent Moray was wont to have them broken before visitors in a spirit of pure vanity,) stood upon the table, and the glow of its purple contents was thrown on the silver cups, the grapes, that were piled in baskets of mother-of-pearl, and the embossed salvers of confections that stood around it.

The Earl, richly attired, as when we last saw him, in a suit that admirably displayed the strength and symmetry of his limbs, was lounging on an ottoman, or low-cushioned settle, with his feet on a deer's skin, and seemed wholly occupied in caressing a large wiry hound of the Scottish breed, while the Countess had played to him on her ghittern, and sung that song so common at the court of Mary, but of which the title alone is known to us now—

“My love is layed upone ane knycht.”

The old game of Troy had succeeded; and then they paused a while to listen to the fury of the storm that has been described in the preceding chapter; and, during the pause, we will take a view of this fair and unfortunate lady, who was sacrificed by her lover and brother to the evil spirit of statecraft and ambition. But when Bothwell gazed on her, which he did from time to time, his dark eyes filled with softness, as hers did with love and languor.

The outline of her little figure (for she was of low stature) was singularly graceful, as she half reclined on the seat of crimson velvet, with the deep colour of which her neck and arms contrasted so admirably. Her eyes were of the deepest and most sparkling black; and when they dilated at times, seemed almost larger than her cherry mouth.

She was a gentle and excitable creature.

The fineness of her nervous temperament might have been read in the thinness and exquisite fairness of her skin, in the slender blue veins of her snowy temples, and the lustre of her large dark orbs, which with every emotion of joy, tenderness, or grief, seemed to swim in tears. Her very laughter had some-

thing strangely clear, ringing, and hysterical in it. Her small white hand, at which the Earl almost unconsciously gazed more than at the diagram of the game, from its thinness and delicacy, was alike indicative of her nature and disposition.

Jane of Huntly was every way the *belle*-ideal of that description of high-born beauty, upon whose soft cheek not even the wind of heaven had been permitted to blow "too roughly."

She was richly attired in black velvet, flowered with silver thread; her raven hair was braided with a string of pearls, and wreathed in a coronal round her head; while a necklace of Scottish topazes and Arran stones, set in gold, sparkled on her bosom and sustained a silver crucifix, the dying gift of the stout Earl her father, who, four years before, had fallen in his armour on the battle-field of Corriche.

When Bothwell gazed upon his countess, there was more of admiration, perhaps, than love in his expression. He loved her well enough after the fashion of the world, but not so devotedly and well as that gentle being deserved. Anna had almost been forgotten; his flexible heart had been so frittered away among his innumerable loves, that he seemed to have become incapable of any lasting impression. However, he loved his bride better than he expected; for, as we have before stated, this marriage had, on his part, been strictly one of policy.

At times when Jane's dark eyes met his with their clear full gaze, there was a keen and searching expression in their starlike depth, that made the reckless noble quail, he knew not why; but her whole soul seemed to light them up with a vivid expression that troubled him.

"Another flash—and another!" she exclaimed, watching the lightning and clapping her hands, while her swimming eyes glittered with childlike joy. "Oh, mother of God!—how beautiful—how brilliant! Ah, that I were among the woods where the lightning is flashing, or at the linn where the Clyde is pouring in foam from the rocks!"

"By the Holy Rood!" replied the Earl, with surprise, "I think thou art better here, my bonnibel. None but a water-kelpie could live abroad to-night, and one half-hour of such a storm would send thee to the company of the saints."

"And again thou wouldst be free to woo and win another," rejoined the Countess, laughing.

"I never wooed, and shall not win another, my bonny Jane!" said the lying Earl; while lounging on the velvet cushions he caressed his little Countess, and played with her dark glossy hair, thinking as he did so, "Ah, how could I ever love any woman but a dark one!"

"And wilt thou always love me as thou dost now?" asked the Countess with the most engaging playfulness.

"Love thee!" stammered the Earl, perplexed by a question so pertinent to his thoughts. "My ladybird, why that thought?"

"Because," replied Jane, in a voice that was tremulous from the excess of her emotion; "if thou didst cease to love, O my dear lord! I would——"

"What?"

"Die!" and her beautiful head drooped on his shoulder.

"Anna's very words!" thought the conscience-stricken Earl, as he gazed upon her with anxiety and astonishment. Her expression startled him; but he knew not that it was the wild animation and over-excitement that in a little time would be developed in a terrible malady, which was already preying upon the fragile form and ardent mind of the Countess—madness!

"Why dost thou doubt my love, Jane?" said the Earl; "it is four years since the Bishop of Dunblane betrothed thee unto me, and in that time my heart hath never wandered from thee."

"Ah! I don't doubt it—mother of God forefend that I should!" exclaimed the little Countess, while her eyes filled with tears, and she clung closer to her husband, "for thou wert the first love and the idol of me."

Bothwell's heart was touched; a pang shot through it when contemplating the deceit he had practised towards this loving and trusting creature, in winning her young heart and still retaining his own, and he kissed her tenderly.

"And thou, too, art mine idol, Jane; for since I first met thee, the fairest faces in the halls of Holyrood and Linlithgow have been without one attraction for me."

"And yet, dost thou know, there was one of whom, until her marriage, I was wont to be jealous; for thou wert ever engaged with her in conversations full of wit and laughter and repartee."

"Hah!" said Bothwell, colouring perceptibly. "Thou meanest Mary Beaton, I warrant."

"Nay! Nay!" laughed the Countess; "naughty varlet! thou knowest well whom I mean."

"Mary Fleming, then, whose father fell at Pinkie-cleugh."

"Nay, God forbid! she is the wife of thy friend, the secretary; another, and a fairer Mary, still."

"By St. Abb on the Nab! little fairy, thou meanest the Queen herself!" exclaimed Bothwell with a loud laugh, as if he had no previous idea of who was meant. "This would be to make me a rival of Henry Darnley—a proper squire, and a tall fellow, too—Ha! ha! thou art a merry wag, my bonnibel," added the Earl, as he turned to the grape basket, for the purpose of hiding the deep colour that crimsoned his face from beard to temple. "Thou mistakest, dear Jane; my thoughts never soared so high, and it may prove dangerous to—hark! is not that the blast of a hunting-horn?"

"And by the river-side?"

"Some belated wayfarer."

"I see no one," said the Countess, who had run to a window.

"It may be Lauchope and his jackmen—there was some whisper abroad of their riding to-night, anent his feud with the Laird of Clelland concerning their meithes and marches. Seest thou aught like lances or steel caps glittering in the moonlight, for now the storm has died away?"

"There is a man by the river-side. Hark! he winds his bugle again and again; the poor soul seemeth in some sad jeopardy."

"Ho! Calder—Bertram—French Paris—ho there, without!" cried the Earl; and two pages, the younger sons of the neighbouring lairds of South Calder and Bertramshotts appeared, rubbing their eyes, for they had both fallen asleep in the ante-chamber over tric-trac and Rochelle. "Quick! ye little guzzling varlets—summon the Gateward and his yeoman—away to the river, and see what aileth yonder fellow that he winds his horn so dolorously!"

"Mother Mary!" cried the Countess, clinging to the Earl; "see—see! he is about to plunge into that rapid stream—he is in! God—now—now! see how he buffets with the current! Oh, how small, how feeble, he seems amid that hoarse and foaming river! Oh, save him! for the love of Heaven and of heavenly mercy: away, my lord, away!"

"'Tis more than likely this fellow is some rascally Egyptian. There hath been a band of such knaves on Bothwellmuir for this month past; but should it be Johnnie Faa himself—hurry the Gateward—and his grooms——"

"Now—now he is gone—he is down ! how fast the current sweeps him on ! I can look no more !" and, burying her face in her hands, the excitable little Countess fell on her knees, exclaiming passionately, "Fie on thy boasted valour, Lord of Bothwell ! for thou hast stood idly by and seen this poor man drowned !"

"By cross and buckler ! since thou art so free with thy husband's life, Lady Jane," said the Earl angrily, "'tis alike at the service of thee and this knave-errant. Follow me, Calder and French Paris !" and, raising the arras that concealed a door which communicated with a staircase and postern leading to Bothwellbank, the Earl rushed away.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RESCUE.

ATTENDED only by two of his pages, Bothwell left the postern door at the foot of the Valence Tower, and hurried down the *bank*, or wooded declivity, at the base of which the Clyde, swollen by the recent rains, was foaming past with a hoarse and ceaseless roar, rending the rough whin boulders and red earth from its scaured banks, and hurrying trees, and turf, and bushes—the debris of its hundred tributaries—to the waves of the western sea.

"Use thine eyes, Calder ! Dost thou see him, Paris ?" said the Earl, stooping low to pierce the gloomy shade thrown by the copse-wood upon the river.

"He struggles yonder, my lord !" cried Nicholas Hubert, or French Paris, as he was usually named.

"Nay, thou glaiket mole !" said little Calder ; "'tis a tree. Seest thou not that he buffets the water a furlong further down ?"

"Right, my little fellow ! thou hast the very eyes of a true huntsman !" said the Earl ; "'tis a man's head ; I see him ; he floats like a cork on the strong current. Shout, boys, while I wind my bugle, to let him know that aid is nigh !"

The pages placed their hands to their mouths, and uttered a loud hunting holloa, while Bothwell repeatedly wound his silver bugle. Then a faint cry came from the hissing water, and the drowning man waved an arm with the action of despair.

"He points to the Priory," said Paris; "now, what may that import?"

"By Saint Paul! he is in harness!" exclaimed the Earl; "and the weight of it is sinking him fast. Shall we stand here, like base runnions, and see him perish? Never!"

"Good, my lord—be wary!" urged Calder.

"Sweet, my noble master—have a care?" said Paris; "he may only be some drunken trooper of Lauchope or Clelland's, whom his comrades have lost when fording the river!"

"But to die, and unaided, under my hall windows! No! no! that would be a blight upon my name for ever," cried the Earl, as he unbuckled his belt, and, throwing down his mantle, bugle, and poniard, leaped without a moment's hesitation into the watery tumult, exclaiming, as he did so, "Saint Bothan of Bothwell for me!"

He plunged in a few yards above where the man was struggling with the current, that was foaming past him with the speed of a swollen mill-race.

Exhausted with his efforts, the unfortunate swimmer clung to an ash-tree that had sunk into the stream by having the soil partly washed away from its root, and the foam-bells were dancing white and frothy around it. The current bore the Earl close to him; he grasped him by the scarf, and then, both yielding a little to the impetuous current, swam together to a point of rock close by, where the Earl, strong, active, and fresh, dragged the rescued man ashore, and he was immediately supported by the pages, who were very vociferous in praise of their lord's courage and address.

"Praise God, and not me!" he replied; "for a moment more had seen the poor man perish. Behold the tree to which he clung!"

At the moment he spoke, the tough ash was rent from its tenacious rooting, and swept by the swollen stream like a withered reed round the wooded promontory, which is crowned by the castle of Bothwell.

"'Twas a brave feat, and a perilous!" said Paris.

"A gallant deed and a godly!" chorused young Calder, though both were laughing in secret to see their lord shaking himself like a water-spaniel.

"Enough," said he, "from both, and thou in especial, Master Calder, for thou hast the very snuffle of a preacher in thy nostrils. Remove this man's steel bonnet—faith! he seems

quite speechless ; but lead him by the postern to the hall, while I don me another doublet and shirt, for I am wet as a water-dog."

A few minutes sufficed to change the Earl's attire, and to find him lounging on the crimson settle in that luxurious chamber, toying with the Countess's raven ringlets, and listening to her praises of his strength and courage, and her regrets and agonies, &c., for the danger on which her taunts had hurried him.

Her dark eyes were again sparkling with light and love ; but the tenderness and engaging fondness of her manner failed as before to enliven or win the attention of her husband.

In his mind there was, he knew not why, a sad presentiment of impending evil ; his heart was oppressed by that kind of dead calm that in some men precedes a tempest of passion. The childlike fondling of the beautiful Countess was now lavished in vain. Ceasing to address him, she sighed and drooped her head ; while her fairy fingers patted and played with the strong hand and arm, that, more from habit than from love, had almost unconsciously encircled her.

French Paris, the Earl's favourite and most trusted page, now raised the arras, and presented his sauey and ruddy face.

"Well?" asked the Earl, "how fares it with the person whom I fished out of the river?"

"He will be well, and with you anon, my lord."

"What manner of man is he?"

"French, my lord, I think ; but he has not yet spoken."

"Good ! by his sleeves of fluted plate I deemed him a gentleman. He will be one of d'Elbœuff's retinue."

"Monsieur le Marquess has been hunting with the Hamiltons in the wood of Orbiestoun, so 'tis very likely."

"Well, bring the stranger hither with all speed."

"We have hung him heels uppermost to run the water out of him ; and when we have reversed him, and replaced the said water by a bicker of wine, we will present him to your lordship."

"A forward March chick !" said the Earl, as the page disappeared. "By the mass ! when I carried the helmet of old John of Albany, I dared not have spoken so flippantly even to a simple squire or archer as this sauey imp doth to me, who am a belted Earl."

"'Tis the influence of Calvinism," said the Countess ; "but Heaven be praised that thou, my dear lord, and my gallant brother, with Arran, Errol, and Herries, shall again raise up those

blessed altars which the frenzy and fanaticism of an hour hath destroyed!"

"That is just as may suit my ambition," thought the Earl; "but hush, my ladybird," he added aloud; "talk not thus in the hearing of our people, for knowest thou—How now!" he exclaimed, as the arras was shaken and raised; "Paris, is it thee?"

"Yes, my lord. The stranger is a gentleman of Norway, and he earnestly craves a brief audience."

The Earl started and arose; he grew pale, and his eyes sparkled with anger and confusion; but he had still sufficient tact to avert his face, that the Countess might not perceive his emotion.

"Saidst thou a gentleman of Norway?" he stammered; "now, what in the fiend's name brought him to swim in the Clyde at midnight?"

"I know not, my lord."

"The fool—in armour, too!"

"That was the only wise part of his proceedings; for no man ventures abroad in these days without his iron case."

"Silence, sirrah! Norway," muttered Bothwell, in great confusion; "ass and jolthead that I have been! Had I known he was of Norway, he had been tossing over the steepest falls of Clyde by this time for aught that I had cared. 'Tis some demon from the north, I suppose—some devil of the wood, or the rocks, or the ice—some kinsman of Anna—(Nippen himself, perhaps)—ha! ha! come to beard Bothwell in his own hall. God's blood!" he muttered, setting his teeth on edge, while his eyes glared with a fury suitable to his terrible oath; "he must be a stout fellow, and a rare one, who, knowing *me*, will bruit abroad my dangerous *secret*."

He trod hastily to and fro, while, alarmed, and filled with curiosity, the Countess approached, and, taking his hand in hers, said—

"My sweet lord—my dear lord—now prithee tell me what is all this about?"

"What thou hadst better not hear, my bonnibel," replied the Earl, turning abruptly from her; but, on seeing that her dark eyes filled with tears, he added gently, "'Tis the stranger, Jane—a man-at-arms—one of Hob Ormiston's vassals, who would speak with me on matters unbefitting a lady's ear; so, I pray thee to retire!"

"Hast thou any secrets from me—from me, who loves thee so well—whose life is thy love?"

"I keep nothing secret that thou shouldst hear; but this—"

"Concerneth a woman, doth it not?" said the Countess, growing pale, while her dark eyes filled with a strange and husky fire.

"A woman, sayest thou?" stammered the Earl, grasping her arm; "who can have told thee that?"

"Thine own lips did so! Did I not hear thee speak of one called *Anna*?"

"Confusion! no!—go! go! thou art mistaken; I swear to thee, thou art; and anon I will explain how. Retire, lady, for his man would speak with me alone, on matters which concern the state. Paris! raise the arras, and lead him in; but, on peril of thy neck, see that thou keepest beyond earshot!"

The Countess retired, with an expression of face in which surprise and chagrin were blended with the hauteur that seemed to dilate her little figure, as she swept out of the apartment, and the heavy tapestry fell behind her.

"Jealous, by St. Paul!" said the Earl; "but how can she have divined my secret, or learned the name of Anna? Poor Anna! I dream much of her! Now, Heaven forefend I should nutter of her in my sleep, and thus reveal my heart's most leadly secret! But there was jealousy in the eye of Jane, or I am immensely mistaken. There can be none without love, say the casuists. Well; but this maudlin love of hers becomes at times excessively tiresome; and yet I cannot help liking the little dame. Her eyes, St. Mary! how they shone! Ho, here, Calder! lead in this merman—this water-kelpie—and let us know what he would have of James Hepburn!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE REJECTED AND THE RIVAL.

THOUGH the Earl spoke aloud with an air of careless **bravado**, he was not without sincere apprehension for the issue of this visit; and when contemplating what might ensue, if his rash and foolish espousal of the Norwegian lady became known to Lord Huntly, various dark ideas of threats, of dule-tree and

dungeon, were suggested as the surest means of procuring silence. The malice and gibing of his highborn enemies at Court—the Queen's indignation—the Countess' grief and anger—Huntly's pride and scorn!

"Devil!" muttered Bothwell, playing with his Parmese dagger; "it may be old Rosenkrantz himself! Would that Black Ormiston were here to advise me!"

His heart beat like lightning as footsteps crossed the antechamber; they came nearer; a hand grasped the arras, and the stranger (whom the pages had attired in one of Bothwell's own suits, but who still had his sword, dagger, and corselet) stooped as he entered, and stood erect before him, with head drawn back, his breast heaving, his eyes kindling, and his cheek flushing.

Save a fierce glance, no other greeting was exchanged between them.

"I see that the gay Lord of Bothwell has not forgotten me," said Konrad in French.

"The lover of Anna Rosenkrantz—Konrad of Saltzberg—here, within the walls of Bothwell!"

"Ay, proud noble, here!—beard to beard with thee; yet, believe me, had I known that the fortress whose round towers rose so grimly above the river were those of my greatest foe, I had rather have perished among its foaming waters than given one cry for succour, save to God!"

"I disclaim all enmity, Sir Konrad;—but, if this be thy spirit, why seek my presence? My gates are open, and thy course is free."

"I come but to thank thee for having saved a life which, though worthless now to me, I have for a time dedicated to the service of another."

"Thou didst save mine from the waves of the Skager Rack," said the Earl.

"Would to Heaven I had left thee to perish!" muttered Konrad, in a burst of anguish.

"Thou didst then establish a claim to my eternal gratitude, and I thank God that he hath this night enabled me to repay my debt. We are now equal."

"'Tis well! I would not be *thy* debtor for all the silver in the mines of Bergen; thou art alike faithless and base—yea, Lord of Bothwell, I tell thee in thine own hall that thou art a dishonoured villain!"

The Earl started as if a serpent had stung him, and made a movement as if to sound his bugle.

"I am here beneath thy roof," continued Konrad, "within thy lofty towers and gates of strength; and I fearlessly repeat that thou art the villain this sword shall one day proclaim thee, in the midst of assembled thousands!"

"Thou art stark mad, young fellow!" said the Earl, making an effort to restrain his passion, from a sense of the injury he had done the speaker and the deceit practised towards Anna, of whose escape and immediate vicinity he had not the most remote idea. "Konrad, I am aware that I have wronged thee deeply, for I have acted most unwittingly to thee the part another acted once to me; for, in my hot and ardent youth, I loved one who neglected me with a coquetry and a cruelty that, to this hour, have cast a shadow over my fortune and my days. I have loved many since then, but, as God knoweth, none with the ardour and passion that welled up in my boyish bosom for that young girl, my first and earliest love. Since then, a morbid and mischievous spirit has led me—in vengeance, as it were—to make women my playthings and my toys, each after each to be won, thrown aside, and forgotten, when I tired of them—yea, thrown aside like flowers whose perfume is gone."

Touched by the Earl's gentleness, the eyes of Konrad filled with tears, and clasping his hands, he said with great bitterness—

"Oh! Lord of Bothwell, in pursuit of this ideal vengeance thou hast destroyed me."

"Forgive me!" said the Earl, laying a hand kindly upon his shoulder. "Forgive one who has endured all that you now feel; but, mark me, a time will come when thou wilt despise the woman who could so coldly desert thee for another."

"Oh, never!" said the young man earnestly—"never!"

"Remember the old saw that sayeth, 'There are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it.' Thou art still young, Konrad; thy years—"

"Have scarcely numbered two-and-twenty, and already I am tired of life."

"Thou art mistaken; the old man may weary of existence, but the young man never. The ardour of thy love will die—"

"Never, my lord. I tell thee, never!"

"Ha! ha!—how, dost thou love her still?"

"God alone knows how deeply and how dearly!"

"Jesu! after she hath so misused thee? This is indeed the love of romance," said the Earl, who thought he now saw some hope of ridding himself of Anna, and so doing both himself and her lover a service. "Well, Konrad, if thy passion is the same, and if Anna might be restored to thee—"

"What! *now*—when in heart and soul she is the wife of another? Never! Much as I love her still, though on her bended knees she implored that love, I swear to thee, Sir Earl, by God and St. Mary, I would withhold it! I love her, 'tis true; but oh! not with the same passion as of old. Thou hast rifled my flower of its perfume, and broken the chain that love and innocence cast around it. Though Anna still, she is no longer the Anna who was the idol of my first day-dreams. No, my lord, to me her love would now be but a mockery and an insult!"

"By the mass! but I love thy spirit, and if I could be thy friend—"

"Friend!" reiterated Konrad with a bitter smile. "No, my lord—that thou never canst be!"

"Then what devilish errand brings thee now to Scotland?"

Konrad hesitated in replying, for he was so much in the Earl's power that some subterfuge was necessary.

"Is it to seek vengeance on me, or to compel me to do some manner of justice to thy false lemane?" asked Bothwell haughtily.

"Justice? hast thou not wedded another after thy deliberate espousal of her?"

"Dost thou deem the mock blessing of yon mad hermit a spousal rite?" exclaimed the Earl laughing. "What passed well enow for a marriage on the half-barbarian shores of thy native fiord will scarcely be deemed one in this reformed land of stern superintendents, ruling elders, and wrathful ministers—ha! ha!"

Konrad repressed his rising passion, and his hand involuntarily sought the pommel of his dagger; but the recollection of Anna, lying helpless and faint among the ruins of the desolate Priory, made him adopt the less hostile course.

"I go to push my fortune under the banner of some of your border chiefs and turbulent nobles, for thou hast made me loathe the land of my birth, though there I have garnered up my heart;

and sadly the memory of its dark-blue hills and waving woods cometh ever to my mind ; and if, Lord of Bothwell, in the strife that all men say will soon convulse this land, thou meetest Konrad of Saltzberg in his helmet, look well to thyself ; for, by the bones of Olaus ! in that hour thou mayest need the best of thy mail and thy manhood to boot."

"Be it so !" replied the Earl with bold frankness. "If that time ever comes, Sir Konrad, the memory that I have wronged thee deeply will alone make me blench. But go thy way, and God be with thee ! for Bothwell Hall hath scarcely space enow to contain two such spirits as thou and I, even for one night. Ho, there !—French Paris, lead this gentleman to the gates. He is the first who hath rejected with scorn the proffered friendship of the House of Hepburn, and bent a dark brow on a lord of Bothwell under his own roof-tree."

CHAPTER XX.

KONRAD AND THE COUNTESS.

KONRAD was now doubly anxious to return to Anna, on learning the dangerous nature of the predicament in which she was placed, and the sad truth that, beyond a doubt, the faithless Earl had really cast her off for ever, by his marriage with the Lady Jane Gordon. Under these circumstances, the young man knew how much there was to dread should she rashly seek the presence of the Earl, who might be compelled to adopt some dark and desperate course to silence her for ever, in dread of her accusations and clamour, which might so seriously injure his public character and domestic peace.

While the interview recorded in the last chapter was taking place, the Countess of Bothwell was sitting in her bower, with her dark eyes full of tears ; for the manner of the stranger, and certain expressions uttered by the Earl, had roused her jealousy, and wounded her self-esteem. Old stories of Bothwell's innumerable intrigues and gallantries floated dimly and painfully through her mind, and her vivid imagination filled up a dark tableau of—she knew not what ; but which her wilful and impetuous nature prompted her at all risks to fathom.

"Come hither, French Paris," she said to the youngest page,

a pretty lad, who had been presented to the Earl by the young Queen Mary; "come hither," she continued, with one of her most engaging smiles. "Lead that strange man to my presenee on the first opportunity; for I must see him before he leaves the castle!"

"Lady—the stranger?" stammered the lad.

"I said the stranger, sirrah! Didst thou not hear me?" she replied pettishly.

"I dare not, lady; for it seemeth to my poor comprehension that there lurketh some mystery—"

"For that very reason, thou prevaricating little varlet, I wish to converse with him."

"I dare not, madam; for well thou knowest that our lord, the Earl, is not to be trifled with."

"'Tis mighty well, this, Master Paris! can I neither tempt nor oblige thee to obey me, and keep my secret?"

"Thou canst well do both, sweet madam," replied the gallant page, with a coy glance.

"Then here, thou little miser, are ten golden unicorns," said the Countess, taking her purse from her girdle; but the pert boy drew back, saying—

"How, Lady Bothwell! wouldst thou think to bribe the son of a French knight like the spawn of a rascally clown? If I am paid for keeping a secret, St. Mary! 'twill be with no other coin than Cupid's."

The Countess reddened; but finding it necessary to humour the lad, who had her so completely in his power—

"Thou forward imp!" she replied; "one may easily discern thy court education. I will give thee one kiss now, and another after I have seen this stranger. But see to it, sirrah, that thou art secret and sincere, or the kiss may be more fatal than that of Judas!"

"Sweet lady!" replied the saucy boy, blushing with pleasure as the lip of the beautiful Countess touched his blooming cheek, "at the risk of my life will I serve thee; and in the hour I fail, may heaven fail me!"

He sprang away, and, coiling himself up in his mantle, watched near the door of the Earl's chamber till he was summoned to lead forth the unwelcome visitor.

"Boy," said Konrad, "I will give thee a silver crown if thou wilt lead to the first and nearest bridge that crosses yonder river."

"Fair sir, follow me!" said the page; and, cap in hand, by a narrow, spiral stair, which ascended to the second story of the Valence tower, he led Konrad straight to the bower of the Countess.

"Where art thou leading me, boy?" asked Konrad suspiciously; while keeping one hand on his dagger, and the other on the page's mantle, as they stumbled up the dark stair, through the slits of which the night wind blew on their faces, and they heard the endless rush of the adjacent Clyde.

"I lead thee where silence is best, else thou mayest come down with the aid of other legs than thine own."

"How, varlet! what jade trick is this?" exclaimed the young man with surprise, on being suddenly ushered into a magnificent little boudoir, where he found himself in presence of a lady.

"'Tis the Countess of Bothwell," whispered French Paris, "who would learn from thee—"

"What thou art not to hear," interrupted the Countess; "so, begone! and if thou wouldst keep that head on thy shoulders, retire behind the arras, and muffle it well in thy mantle."

French Paris immediately retired; and Konrad, whose anxiety for the safety of Anna (when he remembered the half-dying state in which he left her) amounted now to agony, stood silent and confused, gazing with irresolution on the Countess. He bowed with the deepest respect; for her beauty and dignity, notwithstanding her diminutive stature, were very striking.

The position she occupied, and the splendour by which she was surrounded, contrasted forcibly, in his mind, with the forlorn condition of Anna Rosenkrantz, stretched on the couch of leaves among the ruins like a homeless outcast; and he felt, he scarcely knew why, a sentiment of hostility struggling with pity for the Countess.

Her large and oriental-like eyes dilated as she asked—

"Art thou the man whom my husband saved from the river?"

"I am, lady; but, had he known me, I had been left to perish amid its waters."

"Thou art quite a youth, and a handsome one, too—a Frenchman, I think?"

"Nay, noble lady, I am of old Norway in the distant north; but a good Catholic, as I see thou art by thy crucifix."

"Our religion is a bond of friendship in these dangerous days of obdurate heresy," said the Countess, whose eyes lighted up;

"but wherefore sayest thou my lord would rather thou hadst perished, though he risked his life to save thee?"

"Because," replied the other with a lowering brow, "I am the bearer of a secret that if unfolded to *thee* would make the Lord Bothwell slay me, even if I stood with the grace-cup on his own hearthstone."

"And what is this secret?" she asked with a hauteur that was assumed to hide her trembling curiosity.

"Excuse my revealing it, lady, and let me begone, I pray you, for an agony of anxiety oppresses me. One day, perhaps, you may—you must know all!"

"Now—tell me now, I implore thee? Behold this ring; it contains four diamonds, each worth I know not how many angels—"

"I am a gentleman, and a captain of arblastiers under Frederick of Denmark, and to me your bribe is proffered in vain. I repeat, madam, that I must decline to reveal the secret."

"This is alike insolent and cruel!" said the Countess, raising her voice, while her dark eyes flashed, and her little hands were clenched. "Tell me this instant all thou knowest, or I will summon those who will make thee. I have a proud lord, and a jealous. Beware! Think what he may do if thou art found in my chamber at this hour. Now, the secret—the secret! Man, thy life is in my hands!" She seized a silver whistle that lay on the table—hand-bells were not then in use; and there was something so malevolent in the threat, and so serpent-like in the expression of her wild dark eyes, that Konrad was both startled and provoked. "The secret"—

"Is—that *thou art not* Countess of Bothwell!" he replied, with quiet scorn.

"What hast thou dared to say?" she asked, in a breathless voice, and grew paler than marble.

"That thy husband is a villain, lady—a villain who hath deceived thee cruelly! He has another Countess, who shall one day claim him, and compel him to acknowledge her as such before the assembled peers of Scotland; for she is of noble birth in her own country, and the warlike King Frederick will not permit the honour of her house to be trifled with."

"Man, thou hast lied!—oh, say thou hast lied! Oh, say that thou art mistaken!" said the Countess, in a low and broken

voice, as she sank upon a settle with a ghastliness of face, which the darkness of her eyes and hair increased.

"I am not mistaken, lady. I swear to thee by every saint who is blessed in heaven, and by their shrines that are revered on earth, that I am *not*! He is solemnly espoused to Anna—"

"*Anna*! 'tis the name he has muttered thrice in his sleep."

"Anna Rosenkrantz, a lady of Norway, who at this hour wears on her marriage finger the emerald ring which the hermit of Bergen blessed, and with which she was solemnly espoused."

"Sayest thou an emerald ring?" demanded the Countess, a sudden light flashing in her eyes, while her lips became more white and parched.

"Yea, lady, wherein the traitor had inscribed a legend, purporting that 'the gift and the giver were hers for ever.'"

The Countess uttered a wild cry, and threw her clasped hands above her head.

"Holy Mother, look upon me, that my senses may be preserved! That ring was mine—my betrothal gift to him. He said 'twas lost during his exile; and with that gift (which my good and pious kinsman, the Bishop of Dunblane, blessed on our plighting day) he hath espoused another! But I will be avenged! and by the soul of my murdered father, who with his sword in his hand and the cross on his brow, fell on the field of Corrichie, I will raise through all Strathbolgie and Aboyne a cry for vengeance, that Scotland will long remember!"

"Against whom, lady?" asked Konrad, who had now a dash of the cynic in his manner. "The man thou lovest?"

But there was no reply. Exhausted by the fury of that tempest of passion, which convulsed a frame at all times too excitable and nervous, the Countess had become insensible; and then Konrad, full of the tenderest concern, was approaching, when French Paris, who had been listening intently to the whole interview, and now began to tremble for his own bones, raised the arras, and, plucking him by the sword, said—

"If thou valuest thy life, follow me and begone! Her cries have reached the hall, and already I hear the voice of the Earl."

They rushed down the secret stair to the postern, the arras barely closing over Konrad at one end of the bower chamber, when the astonished Earl raised it at the other.

CHAPTER XXI.

DISAPPOINTMENT.

KONRAD stood on Bothwell bank, the wooded declivity that sloped abruptly to the margin of the Clyde, in whose deep bosom the stars were now reflected; for all traces of the storm had died away, and the wet foliage of the woodlands was rustling in the soft west wind that blew from the darkened hills of Lanark.

High and sombre in its feudal strength and architectural pride, towered up the keep of Bothwell, and its grass-tufted barbican-wall. Lights flashed through the casements of turret and corridor, and loud voices were heard calling clamorously in the echoing court.

"There lies thy path," said the page, pointing towards the river; "traverse its banks for about a mile till thou reachest the bridge of Bothwell. The hamlet of the same name is near it, and there thou canst pass the night."

"Is there no place nearer? consider again, good lad," said Konrad, thinking more for Anna than himself, as he slipped the promised crown into the page's hand.

"The warder of the bridge resides in a house above the archway, which is closed after nightfall. He keeps an hostelry which affordeth good up-putting both for men and horses; but mark me, fair sir! seek neither hamlet nor hostel to-night, for we know not what evil may come of thy plaguy interview with the Countess. Keep in the woods, and lie *en perdu* till day-break, and then God speed thee!"

The postern closed, and Konrad stood alone.

A vague sense of danger impelled him to hurry from the vicinity of the castle; but he was less actuated by that motive than by his anxiety to rejoin Anna, from whom he had now been two hours absent, without procuring the succour she required so much.

He found the passage of the river open, for the warder had partaken somewhat freely of the potations of a traveller who had tarried there about curfew-time, and consequently he had forgotten to secure the barrier-gate that closed the roadway after dark, and which none could pass without paying toll, or drink-

ing a can of ale at his hostel. Konrad passed on; and just as day was brightening in purple and orange on the distant hills, he began to ascend the eminence which was crowned by the ruined Priory of the Augustines of Blantyre.

As day broke on the green woods of Bothwell, and the magnificent river, a hundred yards in breadth, that flowed in blue and silver light between them, no other sylvan scene could surpass that landscape in beauty and romance. Contrasting strongly with the bright green of the summer forest, which was seen at intervals between the ivied buttresses and shattered windows of the gothic priory, rose Bothwell's broad round towers and ponderous ramparts, shining almost blood-red in the rising sun, being all built of ruddy-coloured stone. White and silvery, from the margin of the deep and crystal river, the morning mist curled up through the heavy foliage in a thousand fantastic shapes, and melted away in the thin air of the blue and balmy sky.

Hurrying among the grass-grown masses of the broken tombs and fallen walls, Konrad entered the vault where he had left Anna, and a pang shot through his bosom on beholding her lying at full length, still and motionless, on her bed of leaves. Her face seemed pale as death when viewed by the dim light that struggled through the arched chamber, from a little pointed window in the massive wall.

"If she should be dead!" he thought, as he stooped tenderly over her. "Ah! Heaven be thanked, she only sleeps!"

The contour and pallor of her beautiful face, then attenuated by mental suffering and bodily fatigue, seemed almost sublime in the placidity of its aspect. Tears were oozing heavily from her long lashes, and her respirations were short and quick as her lover bent over her, and, taking one of her passive hands in his, pressed it gently to his lips.

Anna awoke, and started on beholding Konrad, whose attire had been changed; for the pages of the Earl had given him a sombre suit of black sarcenet in lieu of his wet garments.

"Konrad," she said faintly, "thou hast tarried long."

"Not one moment longer than I could avoid, dearest Anna! Thou canst not guess where I have been, and whom I have seen."

"Thou hast seen *him*," she replied, with a radiant face; "whom else couldst thou see that I care for?"

"I *have* seen him, lady," said Konrad, over whose coun-

tenance there fell a deeper shade of melancholy. "I have seen him, and stood with him face to face in his own castle hall."

"Oh!" exclaimed Anna; and, half-clinging to Konrad's neck, she turned upon him a face and eyes that were radiant with eagerness and joy; "and what said he? what message sent he to me—to his well-loved Anna? why came he not himself?"

"Thou hast forgotten, Anna—"

"Ah! my God! yes—the story. He is still faithful to me—say that he is, dear Konrad!"

"Six months ago, with all formality and magnificence, he was married to another, and thou art no more remembered than the last year's snow."

"This must—must be some dreadful dream or fantasy!" said Anna, pressing her hands upon her temples.

"I have seen his bride."

"Is she beautiful?"

"Yes, singularly beautiful, and gentle, and winning."

"Hah!" muttered Anna sharply through the teeth, which were set like a vice.

Her face was pale and colourless. An expression of jealous bitterness, of anger, and reproach, were on her forehead, and sparkling in her eyes, which were almost white with an aspect of passion, such as Konrad had never before witnessed in her usually calm features; and, taking her hands in his, he said tenderly—

"Be composed, dearest Anna! for I never will forsake thee while life remains; and even were I to die, my spirit, I am assured, will hover near thee still."

"*Thou!*" said she bitterly, as she *snatched* away her hands; "what art *thou* to me?"

The young man trembled, for at these cruel words a heavy palsy seemed to fall upon his heart.

"And where is his castle, Konrad?" she demanded abruptly.

"Behold!" he replied; and, drawing back a mass of the pendant ivy and wild-roses that overhung the entrance of the vault, he displayed the beautiful valley or dell, through which the noble Clyde, so broad, blue, and crystalline, was winding between its banks of lofty wood, and overlooked by the dark façade of Bothwell's princely stronghold.

Full on the long line of its crenelated rampart, on the strong round towers that the patriot Wallace, and "proud Pembroke's

haughty Earl," had built, on its shining casements and lofty keep, overtopping the summer foliage and the morning mist, shone the warm splendour of the early sun. Anna gave one fixed and fierce glance at the edifice, and then arose with tottering steps, and wildness in her air and eyes.

"Whither wouldst thou, Anna?" said Konrad imploringly, retaining her hand.

"I am going to him—"

"To Bothwell?"

"I will—I shall see him once again, though only to expire at his feet. One interview may—"

"Dear Anna," said Konrad, who never for an instant, under all her petulance and neglect, altered his gentle and loverlike tone; "thou forgettest that he is wedded to another—a great lady of the land—and that thou art now but as a weed, a bramble in his path, to be crushed or thrown aside."

"Go to! Konrad—'tis but jealousy that makes thee speak thus."

"Thou wrongest me, Lady Anna; 'tis long since jealousy died within me. Oh! *that* was an agony that could not last with life. Tarry but one hour, I implore—thou art so faint, Anna—"

"Dare you detain me, sir?"

"Go, then; and Bothwell's boorish warders and flippant pages will drive thee like some poor wanton from his gates; and think then—when with insult and opprobrium they are elosed upon thee—what thy father, the brave old knight of Aggerhuis, who died with one hand on his sword and the other on the standard of the Lubeekers, would have felt, could he have thought that such an hour was reserved for the only daughter of that wife he loved so dearly."

"True—true!" replied Anna, giving way to a passionate burst of tears; for the mention of her parents subdued her. "O Mary! blessed mother of compassion, intercede for me! Inspire me with resignation and strength to endure my fate. Ah, pardon me, kind and good Konrad! for my heart is so torn by love and shame and indignation, that at times I know not what I say. From what I was in Frederick's court, to become what I am—a poor outcast on a foreign shore—an object of scorn to the proud, and pity to the good! Oh! how frightful! Be still kind to me, Konrad—and end my misery by putting thy poniard into the heart that so cruelly deceived thee."

Konrad was deeply moved by this passionate burst of grief; he leaned against a fragment of the ruin, and covered his face with his hands.

"Anna!" said he after a pause; "bethink thee that Scotland hath a queen whose goodness of heart and gentleness of spirit are revered in every land save her own."

"True! and at her feet will I pour forth my sorrow and my tears together. As a woman she will sympathise with me, and lend a kind ear to the story of my wrongs. Thou wilt go with me, Konrad?"

He kissed her hand again, and led her to the arch of the vault, and then they paused—for at that moment the blast of a bugle, clear and ringing, ascended from the bosky dell below the ruined Priory. Then the flash of steel was seen among the foliage, and a band of between forty and fifty men-at-arms on horseback, three abreast, having two swallow-tailed pennons displayed, and with their steel caps and tall uplifted lances glittering in the morning sun, swept at full gallop round the steep knoll on which the castle stood.

For a few minutes the reflection of their passing files was seen to glitter in the mirror-like bosom of the river, as horse and rider, spear and pennon, vanished among the apple bowers and birchen glades that clothed the braes of Bothwell.

Konrad felt instinctively that they were in pursuit of him; and, with a sadness and anxiety caused only by the reflection that, if he were slain, Anna would be friendless and desolate, he led her slowly from the ruins, and, hand in hand, the forlorn pair traversed the thickets of old and gnarled oak surrounding Blantyre Priory, and reached the rough and dusty highway which was to lead them—but how they knew not—to the court and palace of the Queen of Scotland.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE COUNTESS JANE.

THE Earl of Bothwell was more astonished than alarmed on finding his Countess insensible; but hastening forward with proper solicitude, he raised her from the ground, and the moment he did so she partially recovered.

Her deep dark eyes gave him one full, bright, sickening

glance of sorrow and reproach, then she closed them again, and her head drooped over his shoulder.

Again she recovered suddenly, and, trembling in every limb, withdrew from the Earl's encircling arm, and cold, passionless, and rigid in feature as a statue, gazed steadily upon him for a moment, and, removing her wedding-ring from the marriage finger, laid it on a little marble table that stood near her.

"Now, my lord," said she, in a voice that struggled to be firm, "now, I have done with thee. Give this ring to *her* who now wears my betrothal gift, and may she be happier than I have been! Oh! Bothwell, Bothwell! if ever—"

"Woman, art thou mad?" exclaimed the astonished noble, growing pale with surprise and increasing anger.

The Countess laughed bitterly.

"Mad!" she repeated, and pressed her little hands upon her throbbing temples. A strange light blazed in her dark eyes, that were liquid and swimming, though not one of the hot salt tears that trembled in them rolled over her pallid cheek. "Yes—I am mad! ha, ha!"

A shudder crept over Bothwell on hearing that ghastly laugh and he said—

"Take up thy ring, Jane, for thy manner makes me tremble."

"Hah! doth it so? Oh, Bothwell! did I not love thee almost to adoration, I should spit upon thee! Thy ring—oh! never more shall ring of thine disgrace the hand of Lord Huntly's daughter. Where is the ring that I gave thee in exchange for *this* on the day of our betrothal, when together we knelt before the Bishop of Dunblane, and the old man blessed us both? Oh false and faithless! dishonourable and base!—"

"Speak louder, lady!" said the Earl, whose brow darkened with suppressed passion—"speak louder, I pray thee! Let every groom and gossiping page hear how Bothwell and his Countess can bandy hard words in their quarrels, like two tavern brawlers. What a plague have I to do with thy quips and quirks?—thy freaks and wild fancies? Thou hast found thy tongue, (a waning upon it!) pray, endeavour to recover thy temper also Lady—by St. Paul thy best wits have gone woolgathering!"

"Oh! why didst thou wed me, Bothwell?" she exclaimed in a passionate burst of grief, as she threw herself upon a cushioned settle, and covered her face with her hands. The Earl was touched; he approached, and bent over her.

"Jane, Jane!" he began, in a faltering voice.

"Why didst thou take me from hearts that loved me so well?"

Scorn curled the Earl's lip at this question, for he thought it referred regretfully to Lord Sutherland, who in her girlish days, had been an assiduous admirer of the Countess. He replied coldly—

"I doubt not there are still hearts who love thee in Strath-bolgie—and *Strathnaver*, too."

"Begone!" she exclaimed, in a voice that thrilled through him; for her terrible malady was then fast stealing upon her senses and energies. "Begone to thine Anna, and leave Jane of Gordon to die! Away—begone!—dost thou hear?" And, in the childish bitterness of her passion, she spat upon him.

The Earl withdrew a pace or two; rage crimsoned his features, and he rolled his eyes about for some object to vent his fury upon.

"Oh! why didst thou teach me to love thee?" continued the Countess in her piercing voice. "What led thee to woo and to wed me?"

"*Fatality!*" replied the Earl, with a cold and haughty smile. "Fatality! O woman! knowest thou not that every action of my life has been impelled by an overruling principle, which I could neither see, nor avert, nor avoid? and I know not on what other shoals and rocks of danger and intrigue, this current of my inevitable fate may hurry me. But I feel within me a solemn presentiment that this right hand shall yet do deeds at which the boldest hearts—and my own, too—shall be startled and dismayed."

"Away from me further; for now I see thou art tainted with the cursed heresies of Calvin. *Fatality!* This is not the Catholic doctrine thy pious mother, Agnes of Sinclair, instilled into thy mind. Now I no longer need to marvel at thy duplicity. Thou who art false to thy God, may well be false to me; or art thou growing mad, *too?* Away to Anna, and leave me!"

"Anna?"

"Yes, Anna—'tis the name thou hast often muttered in thy sleep, when, with a heart full of love, I lay waking and watching by thy side, and these evil dreams were my meed. Hence to thy Norwegian!"

"By St. Paul! this fellow, Konrad, hath been with thee! Ah, villain and traitor! beware how thou comest again within

the reach of Bothwell's dagger. Ho, Hob of Ormiston!—John of Bolton!—Calder!—Paris!—ho there! What a blockhead! what a jack-a-lent I have been!"

The page appeared, and too frightened to remember his fee now, trembled in every limb at the domestic storm he had been partly the means of raising.

"Has anyone had access to the Countess?" asked the Earl, with a terrible frown.

"None—none, my lord, that I know aught of."

"French Paris, thou art a subtile little villain, and hadst thou not been gifted to me, like a marmozet, by the Queen, I would have cracked thy head, as thy likeness would a nut, to obtain the truth! Have the lairds of Ormiston or Bolton returned yet?"

"This moment only, my lord. They are in the hall, and in their armour yet."

"Let their stout jackmen hie to horse again, and bid them look well to girth and spur-leather; so, while I arm me, boy, send the knights hither."

While Bothwell hurriedly buckled on a suit of armour that was lying near—for, as we said elsewhere, no man could with safety venture a yard from his own door unarmed—the Countess lay on the crimson settle, with her face covered by her hands, over which her long black hair was flowing in disorder.

The clank of armed heels and steel scabbards in the ante-chamber, heralded the approach of the knights, and their mail flashed as the heavy arras was drawn aside, and they stood before the Earl.

"The Norwegian has been here!" whispered the latter to Ormiston.

"How—who?"

"Konrad of Saltzberg—thou rememberest him," he added aloud; "and he hath bewitched the Countess—a French sorcerer, Bolton, ancient whom I will tell thee another time. Horse and spear! Thou, Ormiston and I, must ride, scour the woods, and slay without reservation or remede if we find him. Nay, that were too cruel, perhaps; let us capture him, at all events. Tell your people, sirs, he is a tall fellow, with a long sword, a corselet, breeches and hose of sable sarcenet. Twenty unicorns to the finder and capturer!"

"We must breathe our steeds first," said Ormiston, as he

drew the clasps and buckles of the Earl's armour; "we have had a tough night's work with Clelland and Lauehope. They stood it stoutly, with a hundred lances and fifty archers a-side. We have had a raid on Bothwell-muir that will make a noise among the justiciary lords at Edinburgh."

"And how came these knaves to quarrel?"

"Because at Candlemas last, one took precedence of the other in crossing Calder Brig."

"A just cause and a proper for three hundred blockheads to tilt at each other's throats! And how comest thou, Hob, to lift lance in this wise feud?"

"Because I count kindred with Clelland."

"And thou, Bolton, why wentest thou with thy fifty lances?"

"Because I claim kindred with Ormiston."

"So may ye all *hang* together in the end!" said the Earl, angrily; "while I, your lord and feudal superior, want you, ye are fighting under other banners. Now, Paris, my sword and salade. Summon my grooms, and let us to horse—the fellow cannot be far off yet."

Hob of Ormiston was sheathed in a favourite suit of black armour, which he usually wore to render his sobriquet more complete; but Bothwell's particular friend and ally, Hepburn of Bolton, who was captain of his eastle of Hermitage, and lieutenant of Queen Mary's Areher Guard, wore a magnificent suit of polished steel, the gorget and shoulder-plates of which were riveted with rows of gold-headed nails. He was a young and handsome man, and his bright blue eyes sparkled with merriment and good humour under the uplifted visor of his helmet.

Both these gentlemen helped themselves, unasked, to wine, from a red vase of gilded crystal that stood on a buffet, and both laughed somewhat uneeremoniously at the unseemly conjugal feud that had evidently taken place, and each made his remarks thereon with a blunt carelessness peculiar rather to the men than to the age.

"The Lady Bothwell seemeth ill at ease," said Ormiston, winking to Hepburn over his wine horn.

"Fore heaven! he must have been a marvellous sorcerer, this Konrad," laughed the young knight, showing all his teeth under a brown moustache; "and if I come within a lance length of him, he will have reason to remember Jock of Bolton for the short remainder of his days."

"Adieu, my bonnibel!" said the Earl, in a low voice, as he laid his hand caressingly on the shoulder of the Countess, who never raised her drooping head.

"Adieu!" she sobbed; "and may it be for ever!"

"Ah! my jo, Jean—these are severe words," said the Earl, with a faint attempt to laugh; for at times he really felt a sincere tenderness for his little wife.

"Would to God, thou false lord, that I had never met—never married thee!"

"Well, ladybird," said he, with a sudden hauteur that was almost cruel, "thou mayest thank thy kinsman, the politic Earl of Huntly, whose intrigues to procure a rich husband for his tocherless sister brought that bridal about. By our lady! I never sought thee, save in the mere spirit of pastime and gallantry, and in that spirit, Lady Jane, I own that I loved thee well enough for a time."

"A time!" reiterated the Countess.

"Yes—what more wouldest thou have, thou exacting little fairy?"

"A time!" she repeated, and bent her bright but humid eyes upon him, while pressing her white hands tightly together. "Oh, 'twas a pity that love so tender should ever have been spoiled by marriage!"

"Thou growest sarcastic," said the Earl, as he nodded to her jocosely, adjusted his helmet, and began to whistle, "*My Jollie Lemane*"—then after a time, he added, "We were never quite suited for each other, my bonnibel. Thou wert too exacting—I too gay."

The poor young Countess wrung her hands, and uttered that low laugh which thrilled through Bothwell's heart. His countenance changed; he drew back, and regarded her anxiously through his closed visor.

"Thou makest a devil of a fuss about this escapade, Lady Bothwell!" said Hob of Ormiston, in his deep bass voice; he had been intently polishing his cuirass with the lining of his gauntlet, and endeavouring to repress his disdain for the Earl's quietness, this fierce baron being in his own household despotic and terrible as a Tartar king or a Bedouin chief. "Why should not thy husband, the Earl, have a gay lemane as well as the godly Arran, the pious Morton, and other nobles, who hold natheless a fair repute in kirk and state?"

"True," said Hepburn, laughing heartily at this coarse remark, "even Master Knox, too ! Is there not a story abroad in the Luckenbooths, of his having been found gambolling with a wight-wapping lass in a covered killogie ?" *

"Mother Mary !" exclaimed the Countess wildly, as she rose to her full height, and turned her eyes of fire upon the speaker ; "have I fallen so low, that I have become the sport of ruffians such as you ? Begone from my bower ere I die ! Is this a place, Lord Earl, for thy cut-throats and swash-bucklers to bully and swagger in ?"

Black Ormiston uttered a loud laugh.

"Sweet Madam," began Hepburn—

"And thou, too, John of Bolton ; begone, for an officious fool !"

"By St. Paul !" said the Earl angrily, "when thou insultest my friends thus, the atmosphere of the house must be too hot to suit me. Paris, ho ! attend to thy mistress ; and now, sirs, to horse and away, for by the honour of Hepburn, the rascally Norseman who hath brought all this mischief about, shall dree his reward ere the sun goes down."

As they descended to the castle-yard, a wild hyena-like cry came from the Countess's bower, but instead of pausing they hastened their steps.

Horribly it rang in the hollow of Bothwell's helmet, and by it he knew that what he had dreaded was now come to pass—

That his Countess was mad !

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PURSUIT.

THE morning sun rose brightly upon the windings of the azure Clyde, and on the green woodlands whose foliage was reflected on its surface, as Bothwell and his two friends, at the head of about fifty jackmen, mounted on strong and fleet horses, of border training, and armed with steel caps, shirts of mail, two-handed swords and long lances, dashed at full gallop from the archway of the castle, rumbled over the sounding drawbridge, and descending from the height through the barbican gate,

* See Life of Knox.

plunged into the bosky coppice below, where their bright armour and weapons were seen flashing and glinting among the green foliage, as they spurred towards the bridge and village of Bothwell.

"We must have this Norwegian either killed or captured," said Bothwell emphatically to Ormiston, as they galloped at the head of their train. "To have him at large with such a story on his tongue, would be submitting to my own destruction."

"True, my lord!" replied the unscrupulous retainer; "suppose he fell in the way of Moray or of Morton—what a notable discovery! Thou sayest aright; to leave him at liberty on Scottish ground, with this secret in his fool's noddle, would but serve to ruin thee at Holyrood, and injure all who follow thy banner."

"He has, as we know, wrongs to avenge; and men, in these brisk days of ours, are not wont to follow those precepts of scripture, which Knox and Wishart have dinned into our ears—by turning one cheek to the foe who smites us on the other—and these wrongs may lead him straight to the ears of Huntly. Fool that I was, when he stood on my own hall floor——"

"Where was then thy dagger?" asked black Hob, with a ferocious look.

"May God forbid—and forefend its use in such a place!" replied the Earl. "Such a trick were worse than that old Douglas played the Knight of Bombie at the Castle of Threave, and a deed deserving such meed as I pray Heaven may mete to me, in that hour when I fall so far in guilt. Nay—nay! under my own roof to take the life of a trusting guest! Go to, Ormiston! thou art stark mad, or stark bad!"

"Cock and pie! what a fuss thou makest! Then thou hadst the dungeon, and it might have spared us this ride, which to say truth, after our last night's hard work in plate and mail, with lance and maul, I could very well have spared. I have been cheated of breakfast, too! But mayhap the warder at the bridge hath a bowie of porridge, or a slice of beef and a can of ale, to spare."

"Hob, do thou take the bridle-path that leads to the tower of Clelland; after the drubbing thou gavest him overnight, the laird will not likely molest thy pennon. Scatter twenty lances to prick among the woodlands. Bolton, thou wilt ride with ten men by Calderside, and do likewise; while I cross the Clyde,

and search by Blantyre Priory. *Keep tryste* on Bothwell-muir ! So now adieu, sirs !—Forward, my stout prickers, and remember, my merry men all—twenty unicorns of gold to the finder of this knave ! He is a tall fellow, with a fair curly head, a corselet, and black hosen.”

Dividing into three, at a wave of his hand the horsemen separated, and galloped off on their different routes.

Leaving the Knight of Ormiston and the Lieutenant of the Archers to pursue their various roads, which happily they did without success, we will accompany the Earl, who, with twenty prickers, or light-armed horsemen, rode towards the bridge of Bothwell, pursuing the ancient Roman way.

It was a glorious summer morning ; the air was balmy, and all nature wore its brightest hue ; the green fields and the waving foliage were rich and verdant, and glittered in the silver dew, which the sun was exhaling in gauzy mist. Bothwell, full of anxiety to recapture Konrad, and thereafter to find some means necessary for stifling the dangerous secret he possessed, rode furiously on, despatching his riders by couples along the various narrow paths that led from the ancient way, to the different baronial towers and hamlets whose smoke was seen curling from the woods on each side.

With their mossy roofs and clay-built *lums*, the latter were generally nestling in the wooded dingles which were overlooked by the battlemented peels, that stood in bold outline against the sky, with their red walls glancing, and dark smoke ascending in the sunshine. From their summits many a watchman looked sharply and keenly at the distant horsemen as they rode through the thickets below, appearing at times on the dusty highway, or spurring along the steep hill-sides, with their lance-heads flashing like silver stars among the bright green leaves.

With all the impetuosity of his nature, Bothwell rode fast and furiously on ; and, till he reached the muir, never drew bridle, save once, to cross himself, and mutter an *ave* on passing one of those little chapels or roadside shrines, which are still so common in Spain and Italy, and which the pious spirit of the olden time erected by the wayside to remind the passers of their religious duties. It was rudely formed, and had been erected by his pious ancestress, Agnes Stewart of Buchan, that the wayfarer might say one prayer for the soul of her husband, Adam, Earl of Bothwell, who had fallen fighting for Scotland on Flodden field.

And here the Earl, even in his path of vengeance, paused to offer up a prayer.

The little chapel was formed by a single gothic arch, containing an altar, a niche, and pedestal graven with the words, "*Saint Mary, pray for me!*" but the hands of the Reformers had been there; the shrine was empty, the altar mutilated, the weeds and wallflower were growing in luxuriance about it, and the fountain, that once had flowed from a carved face into a stone basin below, in consequence of the wanton and fanatical destruction of the latter, was running across the roadway, where it had long since made for itself a little channel.

The extensive muir of Bothwell, which is now so beautiful in its modern taste of cultivation and fertility, was then a wide, sequestered waste of purple heather, dotted by grey rocks, tufts of golden broom, and masses of dark green whin.

Traces of that recent feudal conflict, in which Ormiston and Bolton had been handling their swords, were met at every rood of the way, by the Earl and six horsemen who now accompanied him. Broken swords and splintered lances were lying by the roadside, and parties of peasantry were passed, bearing away the dead and wounded in grey plaids, on biers of pikes or branches of trees; the women tearing their hair, and lamenting aloud; the men, with their bonnets drawn over their knitted brows, brooding on that future vengeance which, in those days of feudalism, and of bold hearts and ready hands, was never far distant.

A ride of a mile and a half from his castle gate brought the Earl to the village of Bothwell, which bordered the ancient way known as the Watling-strect. Then it was but a little thatched hamlet, clustered with gable ends and clay lums, near the venerable church founded by Archibald the Grim, Lord of Gal-loway. Beyond, lay the mains and groves of Bothwellhaugh, possessed by a lesser baron of the house of Hamilton.

Here the vassal villagers came crowding, bonnet in hand, around the Earl, and in courtesy he was compelled to touch his helmet and rein up; while the parish beadle, after tinkling the skelloche bell, issued, according to an ancient custom now obsolete in Scotland, the following burial proclamation:—

"All brethren and sisters! I let you to wit, there is a brother, Ninian Liddal of the Nettlestanebrae, hath been slain by the Laird of Lauchope's riders, in a raid yestreen, on Bothwell-

muir, as was the will and pleasure of Almighty God (lifting his bonnet). The burying will be at twelve o'clock the morn, and the corpse is streekit and kistit at the change-house, up by the townhead!"

And he departed, ringing his bell in the same slow fashion with which he usually preceded funerals, to the collegiate kirk of Bothwell.

On the purple muirland many unclaimed bodies were lying stark and rigid,

"With the dew on their brow, and the rust on their mail;"

while the black corbies and ravenous gleds were wheeling in circles above them, in that blue sky on which the eyes of the dead had closed for ever.

"Gramercy!" said Hay of Tallo, a follower of the Earl, as a man, whose beard was white as snow, and whose loose grey gown was torn in many places, hurried out of their path; "is not yonder fellow some mass-monging priest?"

"Gif I thought so," growled a jackman, lifting his lance, "I would cleave his croon! He hath been searching the scrips and pouches of the dead."

"Shriving the dying, more likely, thou knave!" said the Earl; "'tis Father Tarbet, a poor monk of a Reformed monastery, and I dare thee to offer him insult under peril of pit and gyves."

A powerful horse, bearing its steel-bowed military saddle, accoutred with caliver and jedwood axe, lay rolling in the last agonies of death, with a broken lance thrust far into its broad bosom.

Such sights and incidents were rather too common in that age to attract much attention; so the Earl and his followers, without even remarking them, rode on to the end of the extensive muir, and there wound their horns to call together such of their companions as might be within hearing.

One by one the wearied riders came in, but brought no tidings of the fugitive.

Every sheeptraek and pathway through all the extensive barony had been searched—by Woodhall and Sweethope; by the old tower of Lauchope on its steep rock; by the banks of the Calder that flowed beneath it, and in that great cavern where Wight Wallace found a refuge in the days of old; by Bothwell

brig, and muir, and haugh; by the old gothic kirk and the Prebend's Yards; but without finding a trace of Konrad.

Hob of Ormiston, and Hepburn, the captain of Hermitage, came in last, with the same tidings; and, with uplifted hand, the wrathful Earl made a vow of vengeance upon the fugitive.

The armour of the whole troop was covered with summer dust, and their horses were jaded with hard and devious riding.

"And now, my lord," said Hepburn of Bolton, "whither wend we?"

"To court—to court! As warden of the three marches, I have received a summons to attend the Queen, who holds her court at Linlithgow; and I will return to Bothwell no more—not to night at least," added the Earl; "are all our knaves come up?"

"Every lance, my lord," replied young Hepburn, counting the files with his spear.

"Then set forward, sirs—and, John of Bolton, do thou lead the van," and at the head of his numerous train the Earl departed from Clydesdale.

A band of so many armed retainers, attending a great baron to court, excited no surprise in that age. A feudal landholder's influence being exactly measured, not by the number of merks Scots he drew per annum, but by the number of men he could lead to battle on behalf of the king or himself. Godscroft informs us that the great Earl of Douglas, who was slain at Edinburgh about a hundred years before the days of Bothwell, never rode abroad with less than two thousand mailed horsemen under his banner.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS.

It was in the month of June, and in the meridian of one of June's most beautiful days. The sun shone joyously on old Linlithgow's wooded loch and magnificent palace; on its carved towers, the clustered gables of its grand facade; and on the belfry of St. Michael, the friend of strangers; on the venerable oaks and graceful ashes that fringed its azure lake, where the snow-white swans were floating in crystal and light; on the steep and narrow streets of the town with their high-peaked

roofs and crow-stepped gables, encrusted with coats of arms and quaint devices—on all its varied scenery, fell the bright radiance of a cloudless noon.

The sky was of the purest blue, and the lake gleamed like a vast mirror of polished crystal, reflecting in its depths the banks of emerald green, the beautiful palace, with all its mullioned windows and long perspective of crenelated battlements, the summer woodlands, and the floating swans.

Though the poverty and gloom that spread over Scotland with the Reformation, had dimmed the splendour of her court, and depressed the spirit of her people, turning their gaiety into stolid gravity and moroseness, the palace then bore an aspect very different from that it bears to-day.

In many a hall and chamber, where now the long reedy grass, the tenacious ivy, the scented wallflower, and the wild docken, flourish in luxuriance, the well-brushed tapestries of silk and cloth of gold hung on tenterhooks of polished steel; and casements of stained glass, rich with the armorial bearings of Bourbon, Lorraine, Guise, England, and other alliances of the House of Stuart, filled up those mullioned windows, where now the owl and the ravenous gled build their nests; for now the velvet moss and the long grass are growing green on the floors of Queen Margaret's crumbling bower, and Mary's roofless birthplace—in the stately hall where Scotland's peers, in parliament assembled, gave laws to her lawless clans; and the beautiful chapel, where, for many an age, the most solemn sacraments of the first church were dispensed to her gallant rulers.

In the June of the year of God 1567, its aspect was the same as when King James, of gallant memory, had left it for Flodden field.

The leaves were as green and the grass as verdant, the lake was as blue and the sun as bright, as they are to-day, and may be a thousand years after the last stone of Linlithgow shall have fallen from its place.

Its casements were glittering in the sunshine; the royal standard of Scotland, the yellow banner with the lion *gules*, was waving from one of the great towers; steel was flashing on parapet and tourelle, as the polished basinets and pikeheads of the soldiers of the guard appeared at intervals on the stone bartisans, from which a number of those little brass cannon

known as drakes and moyennes peeped between the massive embrasures. And in that deep archway, which is guarded by two strong octagon towers, perforated with numerous arrow-holes, and surmounted by a gorgeous battlement, representing in four carved compartments the orders of knighthood borne by James V.—the Saint Andrew, Saint George, Saint Michael, and the Golden Fleece—were crowding a group of liverymen and swash-bucklers in half-armour, with sword, target, and dagger, their arrogance and pride of clanship being displayed by their bearing and ferocity of aspect, their cocked bonnets, and embroidered sleeve-badges. Mingling with them were gaily attired pages, grooms, falconers, and archers of the queen's body guard, clad in green gaberdines with gorgets and caps of steel, each bearing his unstrung bow, and having a sheaf of arrows bristling in the same belt that sustained his short cross-hilted sword and long double-edged dagger.

The bustle about the palace gates was unusual, for the Lords of the Privy Council were assembled in the Parliament hall, and Mary was seated on the throne.

Into that magnificent apartment, which measures a hundred feet in length by thirty in breadth, and which had a roof nearly forty feet in height, light was admitted by two rows of arched windows, between each of which projected a double tier of beautiful corbels, the lower upholding a line of statues—the upper sustaining the ceiling of elaborate oak, which sprung away aloft into intricacy and brown obscurity. A vast fireplace yawned at one end; it was supported by four gothic columns, clustered and capitalled with the richest embossage.

The young King Henry, a tall and handsome, but pale and beardless youth, whose effeminate aspect contrasted strongly with those of the moustached and sunburned lords of the council, sat on the Queen's left hand. His face was a perfect oval, and his eyes were dark like his hair, which was short and curly. His attire was fashioned in the extreme of gorgeous extravagance; the sleeves and breast of his blue satin doublet being loaded with lace and precious stones. He had nothing military about him save a small walking-sword, for arms were not King Henry's forte, which was quite enough to make the Scots heartily despise him.

A long career of debauchery, drinking, and excess, had ruined his constitution, and now a pallor like unto that of death

was visible in his hollow cheek and lustreless eye; and as he lounged back in his cushioned seat, much more interested in flirting with the maids of honour than listening to affairs debated by the council, he had all the aspect of the prematurely worn out man of pleasure—the satiated *roué*—the *ennuyée*, whom the slightest exertion of mind or body was sufficient to bore to death. Mary, disgusted by his daily excesses, which shocked her delicacy and wounded her pride, had long since ceased to love him, and had learned to deplore that alliance which youthful inclination, and the ardour of her impulsive nature, rather than the dictates of prudence, had led her to form; when from among all her suitors, many of whom were the sons of kings—the Archduke of Austria, Don Carlos of Spain, and others—she, the most beautiful woman in Europe, she, whose genius equalled her beauty, and whose piety equalled her genius, preferred the worthless heir of the exiled house of Lennox! This ill-fated marriage began the long series of those disastrous events which ended in the towers of Fotheringay; but who *then*, when Mary was seated on the throne of a hundred kings, in the palace of her fathers, with the crown of Bruce, the sceptre of James V., and the consecrated sword of Pope Julius before her, could have foreseen that dark hour of humiliation and of death?

The beauty of Darnley's person was his only merit. He was alike destitute of honour, religion, and morality—in all, the reverse of Mary. Vain and imperious, fierce, jealous, and capricious, his temper soon excited disgust in her sensitive mind; and the ruthless murder of her poor Italian secretary, had converted her rash and youthful love into contempt and hatred—for such at times is the transition; such is the fickleness of the human heart; and “the vivacity of Mary's spirit,” says an historian, “not being sufficiently tempered with sound judgment, and the warmth of her heart, which was not at all times under the restraint of discretion, betrayed her into errors.”

At this very time, when the council were most intent upon some knotty points of state policy, the king, oblivious of all, or affecting to be so, was alternately playing with the gold tassels of his embroidered mantle, and coquetting with Mariette Hubert, a young French lady, by conversing in the symbolical language of flowers; for each had taken a bouquet from a row of Venetian

vases that decorated the hall windows, and filled its vast space with delightful perfume. When addressed by the Queen, he replied with a hauteur and brevity that she could ill brook; for, although he had acquired the title of king, and been admitted to share her councils, he was dissatisfied that she did not invest him with greater power, and content herself with the rank of mere queen-consort. To this measure, Mary, aware of his utter incapacity for governing, and the aversion of the fierce noblesse, wisely declined an assent; and Darnley's haughty spirit never forgave the affront, which he attributed to the influence of Rizzio; hence his leaguings with Moray and Morton; and hence the murder in the queen's chamber at Holyrood, fifteen months before.

A succession of strong flakes of light fell through the lozenged casements of the stained windows on one side of the hall, and threw their prismatic hues on the long table which was covered with green cloth, and on the bearded peers who sat around it. All were richly attired in satin and velvet, slashed and furred with miniver; all were well armed, some having corselets and plate sleeves, others pyne doublets, calculated to resist the points and edges of the best-tempered weapons.

There were present the Earl of Morton, lord high chancellor, whose fine countenance compensated in some degree for the shortness of his stature. His face was dark and swarthy; his beard long and sweeping, but its blackness was now beginning to be touched with grey; his eyes, quick and cunning, keen and penetrating, watched every visage, but chiefly that of his colleague and compatriot—his partner in many a deep intrigue and desperate counterplot, James Stuart, the still more famous Earl of Moray, who seemed the living image of his handsome father, James V. He had the same dark oval face, so melancholy and dignified in its contour, the same short beard and close shorn chin, the same thick brown moustache, and deep dark hazel eye. But under that calm exterior were a heart and mind unequalled in ambition, and unsurpassed in state-craft—a wisdom that bordered on cunning—a caution that (at times) bordered on cowardice—a bravery that bordered on rashness; yet never for an instant did he lose sight of that object which every secret energy had for years been bent to attain, and for which his life was staked—POWER!

And there were Cassilis, Lindesay, and Glencairn, dark-

browed, savage, brutal, and illiterate as any barons that ever figured in the pages of romance—each the beau-ideal of a feudal tyrant; morose by fanaticism, and inflated by power; for a few short years had seen them and their compatriots gorged to their full with the plundered temporalities of the fallen hierarchy. And there, too, were the venerable Le Crocq, the good and wise ambassador of Charles IX., wearing the silver shells of St. Michael glittering on his plain doublet of black taffeta; and Monsieur le Marquis d'Elbœuff, brother of the late Queen Regent, Mary of Lorraine.

This gay and thoughtless, but handsome noble, was dressed in the extremity of Parisian foppery. His doublet was cloth of gold; his breeches, of crimson velvet, reached to within six inches of his knees, from whence he had long hose of white silk. He wore a very high ruff, with the Golden Fleece of Burgundy, and the Thistle of the order of Bourbon under it. A yellow satin mantle dangled from his left shoulder; his gloves were perfumed to excess; his hat was conical and broad-brimmed, but he carried it under his left arm. His short Parmese poniard and long Toledo sword were covered with precious stones, and in imitation of the great English beau, the effeminate Earl of Pembroke, in addition to ear-rings, he had dangling at his right ear a flower—presumed to be the gift of some enamoured belle—while from the left depended a long lovelock.

Contrasting strongly with all this frippery, in the dignity of his aspect and bearing, and the plainness of his dress, Sir William Maitland of Lethington, secretary of the kingdom—the Scottish Machiavel, the greatest and most vacillating statesman Scotland ever produced—stood at the foot of the green table.

Attired in simple black velvet, but having a long stomacher dotted with seed pearls, an enormous fardingale, and a little ruff round her delicate neck, Mary, having little other adornment than those which nature had given her, sat under the purple canopy of her grandsire, James IV. From a brow that bore the impress of intelligence and candour, her auburn hair that gleamed like gold (when, from a lofty casement above, the sunlight fell upon it), was drawn back from her snowy temples, and, by being puffed out on each side, while her little velvet cap was depressed in the centre by a gold drop, increased the

dignified contour of a face that was never beheld without exciting admiration and love. The steady brilliance of her splendid dark eyes, the form of her nostrils, together with the exquisite curve of her short upper lip, and dimpled chin, all expressed in an eminent degree the various emotions of her acute and sensitive mind; while they were ever full of a sweetness and beauty that were no less singular in their character than remarkable in their degree.

Every turn of her beautiful head, every motion of her rounded arms and dimpled hands, were full of grace; so that even "dark Morton," the ferocious Lindesay, and subtle Moray, while at that moment plotting her downfall and destruction, could not but in their secret souls acknowledge how noble and bewitching was that being whom they were seeking to hurl from the Scottish throne.

She carried at her waist a little amber rosary, or Saviour's chaplet, of thirty-three beads, being one for each year that Christ dwelt among us on earth; and, true to that religion which formed her last and best consolation in that terrible hour which none could then foresee, she wore on her bosom a little crucifix of gold.

Behind her state chair were several ladies of the court, wearing enormous fardingales and high ruffs, and some of them—particularly the Countesses of Argyle and Huntly—having their heads loaded with ornaments.

The captain of the archer guard, Arthur Erskine, a handsome young cadet of the house of Mar, clad in half armour of the richest steel, and having his helmet borne by a page, stood near the doorway of the hall, about thirty yards from the green table, and quite beyond earshot. Close by the door stood his lieutenant, the knight of Bolton, leaning on his drawn sword, and dividing his time between watching the ladies of the court, tracing diagrams on the oak floor with the point of his weapon, and complacently viewing his own handsome person in a large mirror that hung opposite.

Mary's pleading eyes were full of tears; for the rudeness and rebellious spirit of her council stung her pride and wounded her delicacy.

The principal matter in debate had been the muster of troops and commissioning of a noble to lead them to the borders, where a court of justice was to be held for the repression of turbulence

among the moss-trooping lairds of Teviotdale; but the proceedings had been constantly interrupted by the boisterous Patrick Lord Lindesay, and William Earl of Glencairn, who in harsh and scandalous terms urged upon their compeers the necessity of enforcing stringent laws against the Church of Rome, as a just meed for its tyranny in the noon of pride and power.

"Yea, my lords," continued the latter, pursuing with kindling eyes and furious gesture the train of his address; "methinks I need not inform you, that there have been divers and sundry acts of estate passed in the days of the James's, her majesty's royal predecessors, yea, and in our sovereign lady's time, quhilk aggreith not with the holy word of God—acts tending to the maintenance and upholding of idolatry and the mass, the superstition and the mummary of the Church of Rome—"

"*Ma chère Madame!*" began the Marquis d'Elbœuff, rising with his hand on his sword, and his kindling eyes fixed on Mary.

"My lord—my lord!" exclaimed Lethington and the politic Moray together, on seeing that the queen's eyes were flashing through their tears.

"He speaketh like a stout man and true," said old Lord Lindesay, starting up on the opposite side of the table, and leaning on his long and well-rusted Flemish sword. "He sayeth the truth, quhilk I will maintain against all gainsayers with this gude whinger, body for body on foot or on horseback. For what, my lords, was the mumming of the mass but ane superstition devisit of auld by the devil, and his godson, the Bishop of Rome—callit the Paip; and I swear, and avow, and aver, that no man should, or shall, be permitted to uphold him or them, in thought, or word, or deed, from this time forward, within the realm and isles of Scotland, under pain of proscscription, banishment, barratrie—yea, and death!"

"Stout Lindesay, thou sayest well!" responded Glencairn; "and a bright day was it for Scotland, when the bellygods and shawclings of Rome lay grovelling in the dust of their gilded altars and painted blasphemies."

"Gramercy! my lords," said Mary, sarcastically, "I think that few men should be more merciful to our fallen church than you. Fie! Lord Lindesay: is not thy daughter Margaret wedded to David Beatoun of Creich, a son of the great cardinal who was the very emperor of those Roman bellygods; while

thou, my Lord Glencairn, brookest all the broad lands and rich livings, chapelries and altarages of the noble Abbey of Kilwinning?"

Lindesay's swarthy cheek glowed brick-red, and Glencairn's brow was darkened by a deeper frown.

"*Ah, ma bonne!*" said Mary, turning to her sister, the Countess of Argyle, and whispering something in French, at which they both laughed; while the two pillars of the Reformation, who knew as much of French as they did of Choctaw or Cherokee, exchanged mutual glances expressive of unutterable ferocity. Moray and Morton also exchanged two of those deep smiles which their faces always assumed when anything like a storm was brewing at the council board.

"My lords," said the poor Queen, in her most persuasive voice, "let us again return to the matter in debate, which is of more importance than framing acts for the further oppression of a fallen church, the prosecution of sorcerers, or enforcing sombre attire and scanty fare upon our poor lieges."

"Matter, madam!" growled Lindesay.

"I mean the bearing of the royal banner to the borders. Lord Lindesay, what sayest thou to assume the baton?"

"I thank your Majesty, but may the devil break my bones gif I will."

"Wherefore, thou silly carle?" asked Morton in a low voice.

"Because the papists of the house of Lennox are ranked under the Queen's banner," replied the rough baron, bluntly.

"By the holy Paul!" said Darnley yawning; "but I deem thee Lindesay the most obdurate, as well as insolent heretic in all broad Scotland."

Lindesay was almost choking with passion at what he deemed the petulance of a pampered boy; but the storm that might have broken forth was allayed for a time, by the Queen saying hastily to the secretary of state—

"Sir William Maitland, will it please you to read the last letter of *ma bonne sœur* Elizabeth, concerning the broken men of Tarras moss and Teviotdale?"

That most subtle of secretaries bowed very low, and while the lords of the council courteously arose to hear the Queen of England's letter read, he carefully unfastened the white ribbon and red seal bearing three lions, and unfolded the missive of the cold and crafty Tudor

He read as follows :—

“Right high, right excellent, and mighty Princess, our dearest good sister and cousin, to you be our most hearty commendations.

“It is well known unto you, that the inobedience of certain of your subjects, and their turbulent inroads and forays with displayed banners and uplifted lances among our baronies and beeves of Northumberland, have bred great misery to our people, who desire to live in all tender love with the Scots on the North side of the debatable land. We may mention particularly the prickers of John Elliot of Park, Kerr of Cessford, Sir Walter Scott of Buccleuch, and other notorious thieves and outlaws ; and we lament that, for the wrongs sustained by our lieges at their hands, this our loving message may be followed by the garter king with our glove, if peace be not kept, and restitution made ; and so, right high, right excellent, and mighty Princess, our dearest good-sister and cousin, we pray God to send you a long and prosperous reign.

“ELIZABETH R.

“Done at our castle of Greenwich, the 1st May, 1567.”

“God send that glove comes soon !” said Glencairn with stern joy ; “my father fell at Pinkie, and my grandsire fell at Flodden, so I have a debt of blood as yet unsettled with those Englishmen.”

“Our dearest sister’s letter contains a most unsisterly threat,” said the Queen with one of her arch smiles ; “but this, her reiterated remonstrance, deserves attention. Sir Walter Scott of Branhholme and Buccleuch—”

“I will be his surety, please your grace,” said Morton, whose niece Buccleuch had married ; “I will be warrant to the amount of ten thousand merks.”

“And I for my kinsman Cessford in the same,” added Lord Crichton of Sanquhar, a tall and fair-haired peer, wearing a shirt of mail and velvet mantle.

“Ten thousand merks—um—um—that the lairds of Cessford and Buccleuch will underly the law,” muttered the secretary, making a minute in his books.

“Poor John of Park ! and will no one become surety for thee ?” said the Queen.

"Nay, your grace," replied Sir William Maitland; "no one would be so foolhardy with his merks. He is the strongest thief between the Lammermuir and the Rere cross of Stanmore; he never rides abroad with less than four hundred lances in his train, all broken men, and masterful thieves."

"All daredevils!" said the Earl of Moray; "troopers with scarred visages, and hearts as tough and impenetrable as their armour. Ah! Park loves the bright moonlight well."

"So do I," added the Queen, artlessly; "how droll!"

"But not in John a' Park's fashion, sweet sister," replied the swarthy Earl. "He loves it as a lamp to light him into Northumberland, when he thinks little of riding some forty miles between midnight and cockcrow—laying a dozen of villages in ashes, sacking as many peelhouses, overthrowing a score of homesteads, and so returning on the spur with all the cattle of a countryside, goaded by the lances of his troopers, who usually have them all safe in Ettrick wood or Tarras moss, long ere the old bandsmen of Berwick, or the riders of the English wardenrie, are in their stirrups."

"We will bridle his vivacity," said Mary. "Earl Marischal, how many of our vassals have repaired to the royal standard, in conformity to the proclamation?"

"Three thousand, please your majesty," replied the veteran head of the house of Keith.

"Then who will lead them to the field?"

There was a half simultaneous motion among the peers—but the Reformed lords drew back, because the Catholic vassals of Lennox were said to be under the royal standard; and the Catholic lords exhibited a similar coldness from a dislike to lead the Protestant vassals of the crown. There was a pause, and all turned towards King Henry as the most fitting person to uphold the authority of his royal consort; but he was still engaged coquetting with Mariette Hubert, and a blush of shame and anger crossed the cheek of Mary.

At that moment the great chamberlain, John Lord Fleming, raised his wand, and cried with a loud voice—

"Place for the noble lord, James Earl of Bothwell, Lord of Hailes, Crichton, and Dirleton!" and the lieutenant of the Royal Archers hastily drew aside the tapestry concealing the doorway of the hall.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE EARL AND THE QUEEN.

BOTHWELL stooped and entered; the arras closed behind him, and his rich attire gleamed in the full flush of the noonday sun, that streamed through a mullioned casement opposite.

He wore a coat-of-mail, the links of which were so flexible that they incommoded him less than the velvet doublet below it. His trunks were of black velvet, slashed with red, and trimmed with silver cord. He wore long boots reaching to the knee. His bonnet was of blue velvet, adorned by his crest—a silver horse's head—which sustained one tall and aspiring ostrich feather. He wore a scarf and dagger; but French Paris, his page, bore a handsome sword and embossed helmet a few paces behind.

The Earl advanced to the throne, and, uncovering his round head of thick curly hair, slightly touched the Queen's hand with his lip. Moray and Morton exchanged another of their deep glances; for the confusion with which he did so was evident to all save Darnley.

"A good-morning, my lord!" said the Queen in French, while bowing with a most enchanting smile. "You are welcome among us as flowers in spring."

"Lord Earl, a fair good-day!" said Darnley and the other lords.

"I thank your grace and lordships," replied the Earl, taking his seat, "and I crave pardon for my tardy attention to a summons that reached me only yesterday at dawn; but I have come from Glasgow on the spur."

"Tis well, my lord," said Mary, "for never did I stand more in need of suit and service."

"Had I a thousand hearts, they would be at the disposal of your Majesty!" replied the Earl with enthusiasm.

"*Prenez garde, monseigneur!*" said Mary archly; "one heart is always enough if it is true."

The handsome noble laughed, as in duty bound; showed all his white teeth, under a jetty moustache; and his jaunty gaiety and smiling gallantry were quite a relief to Mary, they contrasted so forcibly with the austere visages that everywhere met her eye.

"Your bride, the Lady Jane, has come to court with you, of course?" asked the Queen.

"No, madam," replied Bothwell, with a reddening cheek; "the verity is—she still—the reason—your majesty will excuse, but I am bidden to bear her dutiful commendations to your grace. I left her at my house of Bothwell."

"Ah!—in your hurry to attend our summons?"

"Exactly so—please your grace."

"My grace is much indebted to the loyalty that could so far master love as to leave the bride of a few months. Men say she is very beautiful."

"And women deny it," added the flippant Darnley; "the best proof that the men are right."

Bothwell, who seemed wholly intent in gazing on Mary, when she did not perceive him, looked as if he cared very little about it.

"And men say, too," added the gay king, "that, natheless his marriage, the Lord Bothwell is not likely to become a Carthusian—"

"Any more than King Henry," retorted the Earl, with a haughty smile. "Oh, no!—I have still a dash of the gallant left in me."

"And a wish to assist honest burghers in their conjugal duties—"

"Being, like your majesty, somewhat neglectful of my own," added the Earl, in a low voice.

The king, though he delighted in ribald jesting, answered only by one of his darkest scowls; but old Lord Lindesay burst into a hoarse laugh, and whispered to Morton—

"By my faith! but I love to see two such cocks o' the game yoked together. Bothwell's gibe hath bitten."

"My lords," said the chancellor Morton, "with the queen's permission we will again resume the matter in debate. Surely, among the bold peers of Scotland, we cannot look long for one to lead the vassals of her crown against a cock-laird of Teviotdale—a petty border outlaw!"

"If neither the Great Constable nor the Earl Marshal will assume their batons, then I, as Lord High Admiral of Scotland, claim the leadership!" exclaimed Bothwell, starting up. "My kinsman, John of Bolton, will unfurl the royal banner in the field, if the Constable of Glastre, Sir James Scrimgeour of

Dudhope, its hereditary bearer, like an obdurate heretic or craven knight, shrinks at his sovereign's mandate. Nay, never frown on me, my Lords of Lindesay and Glencairn, for I value no man's frown or favour a sword thrust! The vassals of the house of Hailes are ever at the service of her majesty. My kinsmen, John of Bolton and Hob of Ormiston, lead each a hundred lances and a hundred arquebussiers on horseback; and I warrant their followers all stout men, and true as Rippon rowels. I will lead three thousand of my own people to the border, and, if need be, will hold a justice-aire that will long be remembered through Tweedside and Teviotdale."

"*O, je vous rend mille graces!*" exclaimed Mary, who, in her sudden bursts of enthusiasm, always preferred her darling French. "A thousand thanks, brave Hepburn! Thou shalt be my knight, and bear my favour to the south. But we need not thy brave vassals of Hailes, for we number enow of the crown in their helmets, and to-morrow our sheriff and arrayers shall show thee their various bands."

Again Bothwell knelt and kissed the hand of the queen, who glanced furtively at her husband; and in the contrast between his inertness and Bothwell's energy felt a glow of scorn within her which she struggled in vain to repress. He was still coquetting with Mariette Hubert, the same fair girl, and the Earl, whose quick eyes had followed those of Mary, said in a low voice—

"As might be expected in the consort of one so fair, his majesty is ever speaking of love."

"And, like the French, deems that in doing so he is making it."

"A biting jest, Marquis," said Bothwell to his friend d'Elbœuff, who merely shrugged his shoulders, smiled gaily, and made use of his little gold pouncet-box.

"And now, my lords, this matter, thank Heaven! is arranged," said the Queen, rising; "and gladly will I leave this desperate game of state-craft and policy for my ghittern and music, or a quiet ramble by the margin of the lake. Good morning, my Lord Glencairn!—good Lindesay, I kiss your hand! Athole, and *ma bonne sœur*, Jane of Argyle, come, we will retire; and as the king, my husband, seems so much better occupied, we will leave him to his reflections. My Lord of Bothwell, favour me with your hand!"

The queen's brother, James Stuart, Earl of Moray, on seeing Darnley's inattention, had approached and drawn off his leather glove; but on hearing Bothwell summoned thus, he drew back with a smile on his lip, and a shade on his open brow. He bore a deadly enmity to Bothwell, whom he had more than once accused of designs against his life, and one deep glance of tiger-like import was exchanged between them, as the favoured courtier took Mary's snow-white hand in his, and led her to the hall door, where, between the marshalled ranks of a band of archers, and surrounded by the ladies of her court, with all their jewellery and embroidery glittering in the sunlight, she swept gracefully from that lofty chamber, and the heavy arras, which fair Queen Margaret had worked in the hours of her widowhood, closed like a curtain over the pageant as it passed away.

Mary, accompanied by her sister, the Countess of Argyle, Bothwell's sister-in-law, Elizabeth, Countess of Athole, and other ladies of rank, and attended by the handsome Earl, with his gay friend the Marquis d'Elbœuff, and Monsieur le Crocq, whom, as Frenchmen, he preferred to the morose and turbulent nobles of the court, promenaded among the terraces, the blooming parterres, and green hedgerows of the palace garden, through the leafy openings of which bright glimpses were obtained of the blue loch, with its shining bosom, dotted by white swans and dusky flocks of the water-ouzel.

The singing of birds filled the air with music, as the parterres did with perfume. All the flowers of summer were in their glory, and the white and purple lilac, with the golden blossoms of the laburnum, drooped over them. The sky was clear, and all of a deep cerulean blue, and in its sunshine the tints of the distant hills were mellowed to hues of the sapphire and the amethyst.

The spirits of the Queen (freed from the cares of her troublesome state and the thrall of her capricious husband) became buoyant with that delight so natural to her; and then here Parisian gaiety, the splendour of her wit, and the winning vivacity of her manner came forth in all their power.

Her eyes alternately swam and sparkled with joy; her cheek flushed; and her merry laugh rang like music in the ear of Bothwell, who walked by her side.

A spell had fallen upon him!

With every wish to excel in her eyes, and to surpass himself in the art of conversation and gallantry, he found every attempt at either almost futile. An incubus weighed upon him; he was sad, irresolute, and anxious. Sad, because this interview with the beautiful Mary had called up all the first hopes of his heart from the oblivion to which he had committed them; for many a year ago, when, in the first flush of her girlhood, he had dared to love the betrothed bride of Francis II. with the same deep and passionate fondness that drove Chatelard to destruction and young Arran to madness. Irresolute, because he dared not *now* to nourish such sentiments, yet found the impossibility of repressing them; and anxious, because the memory of his double matrimonial engagement pressed hardly and uneasily on his mind.

He strove to crush his rash thoughts and bitter regrets; but they would come—again and again.

He endeavoured to converse with the ladies of new coifs and Florence kirtles—to the French Ambassador of the policy of Charles IX.—to the Marquis d'Elbœuff of the intrigues of Catherine de Medeis and Margaret of Valois—to Huntly of Moray's wiles and Morton's villanies; but he invariably found himself where he was before—by the side of Mary, listening to her musical voice, and gazing, with his old feeling of adoration, on her bright and sunny eyes and her braided hazel hair, that gleamed in the noonday's sunshine.

And now, incited by the lingering love of other days, the demons of a more dangerous ambition than he before had ever dared to dream of, began for the first time to pour their insidious whispers in his ear, and Bothwell found that he was—lost!

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE WEAPONSHAW.

NEXT day the great quadrangle of the palace of Linlithgow and the lawn before its gates presented a scene of unusual bustle.

Few edifices of that age, in Scotland, surpass this building in architectural beauty. Its richly-carved archway was surmounted on the inside by a cluster of gothic niches, containing statues,

of which the defaced image of the Virgin now alone remains. Three tiers of mullioned windows, all of beautiful workmanship, rich with cusping and stained glass, overlooked this side of the quadrangle, the summit of which was crowned by a beautiful battlement; on the other, were the deeply-recessed and heavily-arched windows of the ancient Parliament Hall. One half of this noble court was involved in cold shadow; the pointed casements and fretted stone-work of the other were shining in warm light, as the morning sun poured down its rays aslant over the varied parapets, the carved chimneys, and loftier towers that flanked the angles of this great edifice, which, in its aspect, had much more of the cheerful summer palace than any other residence of the Scottish kings. The royal standard was waving on the highest tower; the Archer Guard, in all their bravery, were drawn up beside the gate of James IV., where there were heralds and pursuivants in their gorgeous tabards and plumed caps, pages bearing swords and helmets, and clad in all the colours of the rainbow; swashbucklers and other retainers of the feudal nobles, variously armed, and still more variously attired, wearing in their blue bonnets or steel caps the badges of their lords—the ivy of the House of Huntly, the myrtle of Argyle, or the holly of Tullybardine. These loitered about in groups, together with peddics and horse-boys, holding the champed bridles of steeds caparisoned for war, in massive trappings of steel and brocade.

The gaiety of this scene made Linlithgow seem so merry, as its old walls and countless casements gleamed in the sunshine, that the lookers-on forgot the gloomier adjuncts of that magnificent pile, where, deep down at the base of narrow stairs, are chambers, vaulted, dark, and damp. Never a ray of light penetrated to the wretch whom fate imprisoned there, though the water fell unceasingly from the stalactites of the roof and from the slimy walls. Yet, further down beneath all these lay the *oubliette*, the only entrance to which is by a narrow orifice, through which the doomed captive was lowered, feet foremost, into that pit from which he was never to be exhumed. In the centre of one of these terrible vaults were found, some years ago, a number of human bones, and a mass of hideous unctuous matter; but of the fate of those poor beings whose last remains these were, history and tradition are alike silent, and leave the imagination to brood over episodes of visionary horror!

But to return.

The old walls shone joyously in the summer sunshine, and many a fair and many a happy face appeared at the open casements; the beautiful stone fountain in the centre (a miracle of carving) was flowing with wine and ale, and a coronal of flowers wreathed the imperial crown that surmounted it.

The gravelled court was crowded with the vassals of the Crown.

The Sheriff of Linlithgow and the Earl Marischal, both completely armed, save their heads, with certain captains of the Queen's bands, were arraying them under arms—*i. e.*, in modern parlance, "calling the roll," and seeing that each proprietor, as summoned by his tenure, had brought his proper quota of men-at-arms on foot and horseback, all properly accoutred according to the Acts of Parliament. Every lord, knight, and baron, possessing a hundred pounds of yearly rent, was clad in bright armour, "and weaponed effeirand to his honour;" each gentleman, unlanded, and yeoman, had a jack of plate with a halkrike, splints, helmet, and pesane. Their spears, "stark and long, six elnes of length," with Leith axes, halberds, crossbows, culverins, and two-handed swords, completed their equipment.

The various weapons were all flashing in the sunshine, while the standards rustled as the henchman of each baron, with a bull-dog aspect of surly defiance and pride, unfurled to the wind his embroidered banner, which displayed armorial bearings won in many a well-fought field and desperate foray. But the most important feature in this display was made by John Chisholm, Comptroller of her Majesty's Ordnance, who had under his orders a band of cannoniers, armed with swords and daggers, and clad in salades and pesanes of steel, with plate sleeves, scarlet hose, and rough buskins. These managed two great culverins, "with their culmes, bullettes, and pellokis of lead or irone, and powder convenient thereto," and all prepared for the especial behoof of those strong and masterful thieves, the Lairds of Park, Buccleuch, and Cessford.

Mounted on a beautiful roan steed, which was armed with a spiked frontlet of polished steel, and had a plume of feathers dancing on its proud head, from a tube between the ears, a jointed criniere to defend the mane, and an embossed poytronal or breastplate, Bothwell dashed into the quadrangle, at full gallop, with his visor up, and, kissing the tip of his gauntlet to

the Earl Marischal, reined in beside him, checking the fire of his horse by one touch of the bridle.

His armour was a suit of Italian plate, profusely gilt in that gorgeous fashion which was then becoming common, as knights were perceiving that the ponderous armour of the middle ages was unsuited for modern warfare ; and consequently they adopted light and magnificent suits, descending only to the thighs, which were defended by large trunk hose, well puffed out with buckram and bombast. He wore white funnel boots furnished with large Rippon spurs, having rowels that would pierce a shilling.

In these ages, the spurs denoted the wearer's rank ; those of the knight were of gold ; those of the squire were of silver ; the yeoman's were of iron ; and it was the fashion to make them clink and jingle when walking.

The Earl of Bothwell wore a pair of plain steel, for Rippon spurs were the most famous of all. A pair ordered for James VI. cost five pounds sterling of his coinage.

"How many tall fellows hast thou under harness, my Lord Marischal?" asked Bothwell.

"About three thousand and fourscore," replied the Earl, consulting a roll ; "but none of the Lennox-men are present."

"Wherefore so?" asked the Earl, whose cheek reddened with anger.

"Tush!" replied the Marischal of Scotland ; "dost thou imagine they would follow other banner than that of Earl Mathew, or the King, his son?"

"The laird of Hartshaw—a Stuart—is here I perceive."

"With thirteen good men, well horsed, and armed with steel bonnets, swords, and pistolettes."

"And Stuart of Darnholm?"

"Nay, he hath sent only his bailie with twelve men-at-arms on foot, and as many on horseback, all weaponed conform to the harness act. Dost think a Stuart will follow a Hepburn?"

"A Stuart may follow many worse, but few better. Dost thou gibe me, Earl Marischal?"

"Nay, Heaven forbid!" said the old noble hastily ; "but in this thou seest the morbid jealousy of the house of Lennox. Darnley declines to lead his vassals to the field ; but thinkest thou he will permit their being led by another? Thy friends, the knights of Ormiston and Bolton, have not as yet come in with their lances."

"Ha!—my own people, sayest thou!" exclaimed Bothwell, as, shading his eyes with his hand, he gazed keenly along the glittering files, which were arrayed on the sunny side of the quadrangle. "*They* are not wont to lag when blows are expected; and, by St. Bothan! yonder they come! I see steel glittering among the copsewood."

Under two knights' pennons, a band of horsemen, with their steel caps and corselets, and the bright points of their long spears flashing in the sun, came at a hand-gallop up the ascent which led to the palace gate; appearing and disappearing as the road wound between thickets of the summer foliage.

"I know not whose the blue pennon is," said the Earl Marischal; "but the other pertaineth to Sir James of Drumlanrig. I surely discern his winged-heart and horses argent."

"Thou art mistaken!" replied the Earl; "these are my kinsmen, John of Bolton, and Ormiston of Ormiston; seest thou not his great banner argent, with three red pelicans feeding their young? Gallant Hob! the spiders will never spin their webs on thy pennon. Well met, fair sirs!" he added, as the train lowered their long lances, and passed under the low-browed archway into the palace yard. "In what ease art thou this morning, Hob?"

"A steel one, as thou seest. Mass! but I am thirsty as a dry ditch with my morning ride. But, lo! yonder cometh the queen's grace and her ladies," said Ormiston, as all the lances were lowered, and there was a ruffling on the kettle-drums.

Mary and the ladies of her court appeared at one of the large windows overlooking the quadrangle, where they waved their handkerchiefs, and bowed and smiled gaily, to those whom they recognised among the crowd below.

"That beautiful being!" said Bothwell, gazing on her with admiration; "shines like a sun among lesser stars."

"By cock and pie! her ladies are like a parterre of roses in the glory and sunshine of summer."

"His lordship's poetry is infectious," said young Bolton, with a laugh; "is not yonder dame in scarlet the Lady Herries of Terreagles?"

"Ah! the old Roman! she looks like a kettle-drum with a standard round it. Dost thou not see she is counting her beads under her fardingale?"

"My lord—if Master Knox were to see her—"

"Or the old Prior of Blantyre, Hob. See, he is still wearing his cap and cassock, as if the act of 1560 had never passed. 'Tis said he carries the kiss of Judas in a box."

"Enough of this irreverence, sirs; for such discourse becometh neither the place nor the persons," said the old Earl Marischal gravely, with that severe aspect which he had assumed since (by the retired life he was wont to lead at his Keep of Dunnotar) the commonalty had named him William-in-the-Tower.

"His Majesty the King!" muttered a number of voices, as Darnley, sheathed completely in a suit of the richest Florentine armour, so profusely gilded and studded with nails and bosses, that little of the polished steel was visible, rode into the courtyard. He was attended by the Marquis d'Elbœuff, who was similarly accoutred; Monsieur le Crocq, the ambassadors of Spain and Savoy; and several gentlemen of the Lennox. Again there was a ruffling of kettle-drums, a lowering of lances and pennons, and then the hum died away.

The housings of his horse, which had been magnificently embroidered by the Queen and her ladies, bore the royal arms of Scotland, quartered with the saltire engrailed, and the four roses of Lennox.

"Excuse me, my lord," said the Marischal, riding off; "I must confer with his Majesty."

"He means the Lord Darnley," said Bothwell, with a bitter smile. "Shame on the hour that Scottish men made yonder gilded doll their king!"

"Humph!" said Ormiston, suspiciously; "art thou jealous?"

"If it should so happen," observed the Earl, in a low voice, "that *he* were to die, what wouldst thou think of me as a husband for the queen?"

"Burn my beard! what—thou?"

"By the blessed Jupiter!" continued the other, half in earnest and half in jest; "she might find a worse spouse than James Hepburn of Bothwell."

"*Where?*" asked Ormiston, pithily.

The Earl laughed; but his eyes flashed, as he said in a low voice—

"Mark me, Hob of Ormiston! let me but crush Moray, Mar, and Morton under my heel, and I will yet govern the kingdom of Scotland even as I curb this fiery horse."

"A rare governor! thou who canst not govern thyself."

"Thou seest 'tis very likely yonder tall spectre in the gilt armour may die soon."

"Gramercy me! I knew not that he ailed."

"None are so stupid as those who are resolved not to be otherwise," said the Earl, angrily. "Men die every day about us without ailing. Dost thou not understand me?"

"Devil take me if I do!"

"Oh, head of wood! I fear thou wilt never be lost by rashness."

Ormiston laughed in the hollow of his helmet, as he replied—

"Like thee, I may lose my heart in love a thousand times; but my poor head in politics only once, therefore am I somewhat miserly about it; yet I see what thou meanest," he whispered with sudden energy. "Say forth, and fear not. Hah! knowest thou not how I hate the Lord Darnley for the ruin of my youngest and best beloved sister; and that hatred is without a love for his wife, which I see thou darest to nourish."

With a cold and deep smile they regarded each other keenly under their barred aventayles; and Hepburn of Bolton, Bothwell's most staunch friend, who had partly overheard the conversation, said—

"Ere the month be out, I think it very likely this lordling of the Lennox may die of indigestion, as an old friend of Hob's did yestreen."

"On what did thy friend sup, Ormiston?" asked the Earl.

"This piece of cold steel!" replied the black giant, touching the iron hilt of his Scottish whinger.

"How, with a murrain! is it thus that thou servest thy friends at supper?"

"When they grow captious, capricious, or quarrelsome. We came to deadly feud about a few scores of nowte we had forayed on the borders of the debatable land from the clan of the Grames, and so——"

"Thou thinkest the king may so sup, and so die?"

Ormiston answered by a short dry cough.

"True," continued Bothwell, "there are strange whispers abroad anent the Earl of Moray and his intrigues; but here comes the king! Place for his grace. Heaven save your majesty!"

"My Lord Earl, a fair good-morning—Ormiston and Bolton,

my service to ye, sirs !” said the young king, bowing with that grace which marked all his actions ; for his suit of mail, which seemed absolutely to blaze in the meridian sun, fitted his handsome form with the flexibility of silk. His eyes were dark and penetrating, but his face seemed in its wan ghastliness like the visage of one who had long been in the tomb : and Bothwell, when he scanned those noble features, so livid and wasted by sickness and dissipation, and compared his slight boyish figure with Black Ormiston’s powerful frame, a sentiment of pity rose in his breast, and he shrunk from the dark hints which, partly in banter, and partly in the ruffianly spirit of the age, the knights had given him. These gentle thoughts were instantly put to flight by Darnley’s insolent manner.

“ I marvel,” said he, with a marked sneer, “ that the gay Bothwell tarries here among the men-at-arms, when so many fair faces, and the Queen’s in particular, are at yonder casement.”

“ I will do all in my power to make amends,” replied the Earl, with ironical suavity. “ Hob of Ormiston, follow me, if it please you ! I will pay my devoirs to the Queen’s grace ;” and with a dark scowl at the king, and a furtive one at his true henchman, the Earl applied his sharp Rippon spurs to his roan charger, and moved away.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE HANDKERCHIEF.

IN those days, the manners, houses, and dresses of the Scottish aristocracy were modelled after those of France, and even to this day traces of the ancient alliance are to be found in Scotland. This imparted to the people a freedom of manner, a tone of gaiety, and a lightness of heart, which the influence of Calvinism was doomed in future years to crush, and almost obliterate.

“ By St. Paul !” whispered the Earl, as he and Ormiston pushed their horses through the crowd ; “ Mary looks like a goddess at yonder casement.”

“ I will warrant her but a mere woman, after all,” rejoined the matter-of-fact baron, spurring and curbing his powerful

black horse. "By that dark look quhilk, just now, thou gavest the king, I can read that thou lovest—"

"Who?"

"The Queen!"

"And why not?" laughed the Earl, with a carelessness that was assumed; "has not love been the business of my life?"

"I hope it hath proved a profitable occupation. But remember that yonder face, with its bright hazel eyes and fascinating smile, is like that of the Gorgon in the old romaunt—for whoever looketh thereon too freely, shall die. Bethink thee: there was the poor archer of the Scottish guard at Les Tournelles, who died with a rope round his neck in the Place de Grève at Paris; there was Chatelard, that accomplished chevalier and poet; Sir John Gordon of Deskford, a young knight as brave as ever rode to battle, and who loved her with his whole heart, yet perished on the scaffold at Aberdeen. Did not young Arran love her even to madness, and raved as a maniac in the tower of St. Andrew's? and then Signor David the secretary, who, as Master George Buchanan will swear upon the gospel—"

"Add not the scandal of that most accomplished of liars to thy croaking!" said the Earl, impatiently, as the dust of the court-yard came through his helmet. "Hob, hold in thy bridle; for thou makest a devil of a fray with that curveting horse of thine! Good-morrow to your majesty, and every noble lady!" he added, as he caprioled up to the window where the beautiful Mary, with the ladies of her court, were viewing the bustle and show of the martial weaponslaw.

"Ah, *bon jour*, Monsieur Bothwell!" she replied, with one of her delightful smiles; "how comes it that I see thee only now?"

"Because your majesty is like yonder glorious sun," replied the Earl; "thousands see and admire you, but few are noticed in return."

"Oh, what a hyperbole!" said the Queen, with a sad smile; "that compliment would suit the sunny sphere of Les Tournelles better than Linlithgow."

Memory cast a shade over the Earl's brow; but his cheek glowed with pleasure as the smiling queen continued—

"The vassals of the crown muster gaily for this border war."

"And still more gaily muster the nobles of the court, to curvet and capriole their steeds before these fair ladies; but,

verily, few will venture their gilt armour under dint of spear or whinger for their sake."

"Thinkest thou so—even when Bothwell leads?"

"Yes, adorable madam," replied the Earl, in a low thick voice; "even when Bothwell leads!"

"Had so many chevaliers of crest and coat-armour assembled at Versailles, there would have been many a spear broken in our names to-day.

'For Mary Beatoun, and Mary Seatoun,
And Mary Fleming, and *me!*'"

added the Queen, singing with all her gaiety of heart those lines from the old ballad of the "Four Maries."

"And why not here, madam?" said the Earl with ardour; "give me but the guerdon you promised—a ribbon, a glove, a favour to flutter from my lance; and may I die the death of a faulty hound, if I do not make it ring like a mass-bell on the best coat-of-mail among us."

The head of the Earl's lance was close to the window, and the queen, with her usual heedlessness, tied her laced handkerchief below its glittering point; and a sinister smile spread over the face of the English ambassador when he saw this incident, and thought how famously he would twist it up into one of those tissues of court scandal and gossip, which nightly he was wont to indite for the perusal of Elizabeth and her satellites, Cecil and Killigrew.

The Earl kissed his hand as he reined back his horse.

"Courage, brave Bothwell!" cried the gay Countess of Argyle; and all the ladies clapped their hands and cried, "A Bothwell!—a Bothwell!"

"Now, ho, for Hepburn!" exclaimed the Earl, spurring his beautiful charger. "Come on, Ormiston! and we will meet all yonder tall fellows in battle *à l'outrance*, if they will."

"I am right well content," growled the giant; "but whom shall I encounter—yonder grasshopper, d'Elbœuff?"

"I would give my best helmet full of angels to see him measure his length on the gravel, were it but to cure him of his pouncet-box and villanous perfumes," said Hepburn of Bolton; "but he is the Queen's kinsman, and she may be displeased."

"Diabolus spit me!" said Ormiston, "if I care whether she

is pleased or not. I will break one lance and his head together, if I can; for he styled me a Goth and a savage, last night, in his cups."

"And I will run one course with Darnley," said the Earl.

"Good! may it fare with thee, as with old Montgomerie and Henry of France!"

"How?"

"A splinter may make his wife a widow. Cock and pie, sirs! A ring! a ring! To the barette! Back, sirs, back! We would break a spear for honour and for beauty. Have at thee, Marquis!" exclaimed Ormiston, as he made the point of his long lance ring on the splendid armour of the Frenchman.

"*Bon diable!*" grinned the Marquis; "*J'en suis ravi!* I am delighted!"

"And have at your grace!" said Bothwell, slightly touching Darnley; "I have made a vow, in the queen's name, to run a course with the tallest man on the ground, and the tallest man is thee."

"By St. John! Lord Earl, thou art somewhat over-valiant," said Darnley, bestowing an unmistakeable frown upon the rash noble, who laughed like a madcap as he backed his horse among the startled men-at-arms and spectators, crying—

"A ring! a ring! Back, caitiffs and gomerals! and then we shall see who are good knights, as King William said of old."

"Wouldst thou have me maintain the field against the beauty of my own wife?" asked the young king, with a terrible frown.

"Certes, ycs! for thou seemest least sensible of it."

"Less than thee, perhaps!"

"Yes—ha! ha!"

"Then, God's death! take up thy ground!"

The queen's archers cleared a space before the gateway, while Bothwell and Ormiston ranged themselves opposite the king and d'Elbœuff, with their visors down, their bodies bending forward to the rush, and their lances in the rest, but having wooden balls wedged on their keen steel points.

The Earl Marischal raised his baton, handkerchiefs were waved from the windows, a shout burst from the people, and, urged from a full gallop to the most rapid speed, the four heavy chargers and their glittering riders met with a fierce shock in the centre, and recoiled on their haunches, as the riders reeled in

their saddles. D'Elbœuff's lance missed Ormiston, who planted the hard wooden ball that blunted the tip of his tough Scottish spear full into the pit of the Frenchman's stomach, whirling him from his saddle to the ground with a force that completely stunned him.

"Now, Marquis, lie thou there!" cried Ormiston, who was uncouth as a bear in his manner, "and pray to every saint that ever had a broken head before thee."

The lance of Bothwell smote Darnley full on the breastplate, and its splinters flew twenty feet into the air; but the king's, being by chance or design deprived of its ball, entered the bars of the Earl's embossed helmet, and wounded him on the cheek.

Deeming this an act of Darnley's usual treachery and malevolence, animated by a storm of passion, the Earl drew his sword, exclaiming—

"Ha! thou false lord and craven king! what the devil kind of demi-pommada was that?"

But the Earl Marischal, Ormiston, Bolton, and a crowd of courtiers, pushed their horses between them, and they were separated, with anger in their eyes and muttered invectives on their tongues.

"It matters not, my lords!" said Bothwell, as he wiped the wound with his white silk scarf, and regained the queen's handkerchief from the point of his broken lance; "'tis a mere school-boy scratch."

"May Heaven avert the omen!—but I have known such scratches become sword-cuts," observed the Earl of Moray, with one of his cold and inexplicable smiles, for he mortally hated both the King and the Earl.

The morning was now far advanced, and the troops prepared to depart. Slowly and laboriously the little wheels of the two brass culverins, with their clumsy stocks, studded with large nails, and cramped with plates of polished brass, were put in motion, by the cannoniers whipping up the six powerful horses that drew them, and the carts containing the bullets of stone and lead, the powder, and other appurtenances for the field.

Surrounded by four hundred arquebussiers, who wore conical helmets, pyne-doublets, swords, and knives, and were each attended by a boy to bear his gun-rest and ammunition, the artillery, commanded by Chisholm the Comptroller, departed first through the deep-mouthed archway of the ancient palace.

Then followed the several bands of horsemen and pikemen, each under their various leaders—and all riding or marching very much at their ease, according to the discipline incident to the days of feudalism, when steadiness in the field was more valued than mere military show. The long Scottish spears, six ells in length, and the white harness of the knights and landed gentlemen, flashed incessantly in the sunshine; while many a square banner and swallow-tailed bannerole waved above the summer dust that marked the route of the marching column.

They soon left behind them old Linlithgow's turreted palace and gothic spire, its azure lake and straggling burgh, as they wound among the thick woodlands that bordered the road to Eeelsmachin; and long ere the sun set, the rattle of their kettle-drums, the twang of their trumpets, and clash of their cymbals, had wakened the echoes of the Bathgate hills.

The Queen and her courtiers watched their departure, together with Darnley, who had joined them, and seemed in better humour from the issue of his encounter with the Earl; but being naturally proud and jealous, he found to his no small exasperation that the ladies were more than ever inclined to praise the handsome peer, and then, for the first time, the demon of jealousy began to whisper in his ear.

"Tell me, Henri, *mon ami*," said Mary with perfect innocence, "did not the Lord Bothwell look enchanting in his plate armour?"

"God wot, I neither ken nor care, fair madame!" replied the young King sulkily, as he handed his helmet to a page.

"He looked the same as when I saw him at Versailles," said the Lady Lethington.

"Ah, Mary Fleming, *ma bonne*!" said the Queen, in one of her touching accents; "we were only fifteen years old then."

The ladies, finding Mary in a mood to praise the Earl, all chimed in, greatly to Darnley's chagrin and annoyance.

"He is a winsome man and a gallant," lisped the Countess of Argyle over her pouncet-box.

"He has an eye that looks well below a helmet peak," added the Lady Athole, as she adjusted her long fardingale.

"O, were he single, I would marry him to-morrow!" laughed little Mariette Hubert, glancing furtively at Darnley's shining figure.

"If thou art anxious to be a rich widow, 'twere a good

match, Mariette," replied the young King, with one of his icy smiles, as he turned away; and, whistling a hunting air, descended to the court-yard, and departed on a hawking expedition, attended by a few of his own personal retinue, who were invariably composed of his father's Catholic vassals from the district known as the Lennox.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE LEITH WYND PORTE.

TOWARDS the close of a sultry day, two travellers approached one of the eastern gates of Edinburgh, when the burgher guard were about to close it for the night.

The sun of June had set behind the distant Ochils, and his last rays were fading away from the reddened summit of St. Giles's spire, and the dark grey mansions of that ancient capital, whose history is like a romance.

The mowers, who the livelong day had bent them over the grass on many a verdant rig and holm, that are now covered by the streets and squares of the new city, had quitted their rural occupations. Between green hedgerows and fields of ripening corn, the lowing herds were driven to pen and byre in many a rural grange and thatch-roofed homestead; the bonneted shepherd that washed his sheep in the city lochs, and tended them by night on the braes of Warriston and Halkerstone's crofts, could little foresee the new world of stone and lime, of gas, of steam, of bustle and business, that was to spread over these lonely and sequestered places.

Gentlemen in glittering doublets and laced mantles, with hawks on their wrists, and well-armed serving-men in attendance, rode into the city, singly or together, from hawking the gled and the heron by Corstorphine loch and Wardie muir, or from visiting the towers and mansions in the neighbourhood. Few remained without the fortifications after nightfall, for our ancestors were all a-bed betimes.

In half an hour more, the foliage darkened in the cold and steady twilight of June; but a crimson flush yet lingered in the west to show where the sun had set.

The two wearied wayfarers approached the lower barrier of

Edinburgh, which faced the steep street known as Leith Wynd, the whole eastern side of which was in ruins, having been burned by the English invaders, under the Earl of Hertford, sixteen years before.

In the fair young man, armed with a round headpiece and corselet, the reader will recognise Konrad the Norwegian, and in the boy that accompanied him, may perceive the soft features and long tresses of Anna, notwithstanding the plain grey gaberdine, the sarcenet hosen, and blue cloth bonnet, under which she had veiled her beauty and concealed her sex. She had all the appearance of a slender and sickly boy, with hollow eyes and parched lips, exhausted by fatigue and privation.

Tremblingly she clung to Konrad as they drew near the low but massive arch of the Leith Wynd Porte, where he knocked on the nail-studded wicket with the pommel of his Norwayn dagger. A small vizzying-hole was unclosed, and the keen grey eye of one of the burghers on guard was seen to survey them strictly under the peak of his morion; for, by an act of the city council, every fourth citizen capable of bearing armour, had to keep watch and ward by night, completely armed with sword and jedwood axe, arquebuss and dagger, for the prevention of surprise from without, and suppression of disturbance within the burgh.

"Now, wha may ye be, and what want ye?" asked the burgher gruffly and suspiciously.

"Who I may be matters little to such as thou," replied Konrad, haughtily; "what I seek is entrance and civility, for I like not thy bearing, sirrah."

"Then I let ve to wit, that without kenning the first, thou canst not hae the second," replied the citizen, whose Protestant prejudices began to rise against one whom he shrewdly deemed by his foreign accent to be a Frenchman, and, consequently, a "trafficking messe priest," as the term was. "I fear me we hae enow o' your kind doon the gate at Holyrood. Some mass-monger, I warrant! Hast thou ever heard Master Knox preach?"

"No—who is he?"

"Wha is he!" reiterated the citizen, opening the pannel, his eyes and his mouth wider in his breathless astonishment. "What country is yours, or wharawa is't, that ye havena heard o' him, who is wise as Solomon, upright as David, patient as Job, as stark as the dcevil himsel?"

"*I am* come from a far and foreign land," continued Konrad, endeavouring to make himself understood by the medium of a little of the Scottish tongue he had acquired.

"Ye are a merchant, maybe? I am one mysel, and deal in a manner o' hardware that cometh out o' Flanders by the way o' Sluice, frae brass culverins to porridge cogues and kail-pats. Are ye a merchant, fair sir?"

"Yes—at your service, I am a trader," replied Konrad, glad to conciliate the man, and to hear him withdrawing the bolts.

"And in what do ye deal?" he asked, still lingering.

"Hard blows—thou dog and caitiff—and I would fain barter with thee!" replied Konrad, giving way to rage as he felt poor Anna sinking from his arm under the very excess of exhaustion.

"Awa wi' ye! thou art some thigger or licht-fingered loon—some frontless papist or French sorner—or maybe a' the-gether, as I doubt not by the fashion o' thy dusty duds! Awa! or I sall hae ye baith branded on the cheek, and brankit at the burgh cross, or my name's no Dandy the dagger-maker!" and the vizzy-hole was closed with a bang.

Konrad turned away exasperated and sorrowful. Though by this time pretty well used to insult and opprobrium from the reformed Scots, who deemed every foreigner a Frenchman, and consequently an upholder of the ancient faith, evinced their hatred in a thousand ways; and once proceeded so far as to stone, in the streets of Edinburgh, an ambassador of the Most Christian king, who was fool-hardy enough to exhibit himself in a mantle of purple velvet, adorned with the white cross of the knights of the Holy Ghost.

Konrad's exchequer was now reduced to a very low ebb, for he possessed but one gold angel and two unicorns—the former being worth only twenty-four, and the latter eighteen, shillings Scots; and though he and his companion had found no difficulty in procuring food and shelter in the rural districts, where every baron and farmer gladly afforded a seat by his hall fire, a place at his board, and a hearty welcome to every wayfarer; now, when arrived at the end of their destination, in a crowded capital, the residence of a court, a trading and grasping middle class, a fierce aristocracy, and their fiercer retainers—the case was altogether different; and he gazed about, with doubt and irresolution, to find a place wherein to pass the night.

The roofless relics of the English invasion would have afforded

a sufficient shelter for one so hardy as himself; but his tender and fainting companion—

“Courage, dearest Anna,” he whispered in their native language; “we have now reached the place of our destination.”

“True, Konrad,” murmured Anna; “but to what end? Oh, I have no wish now but to lie down here, and die! Forgive me, Konrad, this ingratitude; but I feel that I will not now—trouble you very long.”

The young man once more put an arm around her; and, with a glance that conveyed a world of grief and passion, supported her to the summit of the steep street, where, between two broad, round towers, another massive barrier, that separated the city from the suburban burgh of the Cannongate, frowned over the long vista to the east. The grimness of its aspect, its heavy battlements, and deep, round portal, were no way enlivened by the bare white skulls of two of Rizzio’s murderers—Henry Yair, and Thomas Scott, Sheriff-depute of Perth—on long spikes.

Lest Anna might perceive them, Konrad turned hastily away; and, looking round, hailed with satisfaction a house, having the appearance of a comfortable hostelry, furnished with a broad sign-board that creaked on a rusty iron rod; and half leading, half supporting Anna, he approached it.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE RED LION.

THE Red Lion in St. Mary’s Wynd was one of the most spacious and famous of the old Scottish hostelries, and Adam Ainslie, the gudeman thereof, was as kindly a host as ever welcomed a guest beneath his roof-tree. The enormous obesity of his paunch made him resemble a turtle on its hind-legs, while his visage, by hard drinking and frequent exposure to the weather, had become as flushed and red as the lion figuring on his sign-board, that overhung the principal wynd of Edinburgh.

If the ancient Scottish inns lacked aught that was necessary for the comfort of the traveller, it was not want of legislative encouragement; for so early as the days of James I., laws were enacted, and confirmed by James V., that all hostelries “should have honest chambers and bedding for passengers and strangers

travelling through the realme, weel and honestlie accoutred; good and sufficient stables, with hack and manger, corn and haye—fleshe, fishe, breade, and oile, with other furnishing for travelloures.”

This edifice, for which the antiquary may now look in vain, was two stories in height, having a row of pediments over the upper windows, which, like the lower, were thickly grated. The doorway, to which an outside stair gave access, was surmounted by an old coat-of-arms and the pious legend—

Miserere Mei Deus,

marked it as once the abode of a churchman of rank. A low archway gave admittance to the stables behind. These bordered the garden of the ancient Cistercian convent of St-Mary-in-the-Wynd, an edifice of which not a vestige now survives. In the middle of the court there lay a great stone tank for watering horses, and high above the inn, on the north side, towered the smoke-encrusted mansions of the Netherbow.

With numerous sleeping apartments for guests and their retinues, which in those turbulent times were invariably numerous, well-armed and mounted, the hostel contained one large and rude hall or apartment, where all visitors, without regard to sex or rank, partook of the general meals, and were accommodated on plain but sturdy oaken benches. An arched fireplace, rude in workmanship as the bridge of a country burn, opened at one end of this hall; and within, notwithstanding that the evening was a summer one, a large fire of wood from the Burgh muir, and coal—a luxury on which Adam Ainslie prided himself not a little, as its use was then very limited—blazed in the wide chimney for cooking, and threw its red gleam on the whitewashed walls, sanded floor, and the well-scoured benches and girdles; on the rude beams of dark old oak that crossed the ceiling, and from which hung dried scafowl, boars' hams, jaskets, and superannuated household utensils, all placed hodgepodge with those warlike weapons which every householder was bound to have at hand for the “redding” of frays, and maintenance of peace within the burgh. Nor must we omit to mention a great barrel of ale that stood in a recess near the doorway, propped on a sturdy binn, furnished with an iron quaigh, and of which all on entering partook, if they pleased, with a hearty welcome.

On the appearance of Konrad and his almost lifeless companion, Ainslie's better half, a comely and buxom dame, wearing a coif of Flemish lace, a scarlet kirtle and silken sash, and having her fat fingers studded with silver rings, arose from her spindle, and bidding them welcome with the motherly kindness more natural to the time than her occupation, led Anna, whom she deemed "a puir sickly laddie," to a well-cushioned chair, and, finding him too faint to answer any questions, she turned to Konrad, who said—

"Let us have supper, goodwife! for this day hath seen us wellnigh famished. What hast thou at hand in the larder?"

"We have rabbits trussed and broiled, noble sir, capons roasted and boiled, stewed partridges, and the great side o' beef whilk thou seest turning before the fire; but that is for my lord the Earl of Morton, quha to-day cometh in frae his castle of Dalkeith, and the best in cellar and larder maun be keepit for him. Earls, ye ken, are folk that canna thole steering."

"Then get us a capon—a machet—"

"And a flask of Bordeaux?"

"The best thou hast."

"But for this puir bairn, that seemeth sae fair forfoughten, sail I no make a milk posset?"

"God bless thee for the thought, goodwife! let it be brought, and speedily."

"Wilt thou not sup with me?" said a countryman in a plain gaberline, who was seated at a side bench, and with the aid of his hunting-knife, (for, as we have elsewhere stated, forks were still in futurity), was dissecting a noble capon and boar's ham, the odours of which were extremely tempting to Konrad. "Thou seest," continued his inviter, "that I am but a poor destitute like thyself; but thou and thy boy are welcome. I am drinking Rochelle at sax pennies the Scots pint-stoup. By St. Mary! I cannot afford Bordeaux, even though it does come in by the east seas."

"Thanks, fair sir, for this courtesy," replied Konrad; "and if thou permittest my boy to taste thy Rochelle—"

"Odsbody! he is welcome."

Konrad hastily placed the proffered winehorn to Anna's thirsty lips; she tasted it, revived a little, and again sank back, saying—

"Let me sleep—let me sleep!" and, closing her eyes, mutely

resisted all Konrad's winning entreaties, that she would partake of a little food.

While sharing the stranger's hospitality, the young Norwegian, whom anxiety for his young charge had rendered suspicious of every one, covertly but keenly scrutinised him.

He was a powerfully but sparely formed man, whose well-strung limbs had been reduced to mere bone and brawn by constant exercise. His face was pleasant, good-humoured, and manly; he wore a short beard, and close shorn hair; his cheek-bones were somewhat prominent; but his keen and dark grey eye had an expression, that by turns was full of boldness and penetration, merriment and fun. Beneath his gaberdine, which was of the coarsest white Galloway cloth, Konrad could perceive an excellent jack of jointed mail; a grey maud or Border plaid was thrown loosely over his broad chest and brawny shoulders; his flat worsted bonnet and a knotty oak cudgel lay on the floor, under the guardianship of a rough wiry cur. Konrad judged him to be a substantial yeoman or farmer, though at times his language and manner unguardedly imported something better.

He, on the other hand, while eating and drinking with the appetite and thirst of a strong and healthy fellow, who since sunrise had been travelling fast and far, quite as keenly scrutinised Konrad, whose occupation and degree he found himself puzzled to determine.

"By the set of thy head, and aspect of thine eye, I would say thou hast been something of a soldier, master," said the Scot.

"I have been more of a huntsman than a soldier, perhaps; yet I have done a little in both lines."

"Good! I love thee for that; thy life hath been checkered, like mine own. Thou art not one of our ain kindly Scots, or else thou hast attained the true twang of the foreigner. Per-adventure, hast been pushing thy fortune under the banner of stout Sir Walter Scott, whose Border bands are now covering themselves with immortal honour on the frontiers of Saxony?"

"Nay! my sword has never been drawn against others than the fat citizens of Lubeck and Hamburg."

"Profitable warfare I would take that to be, and pleasant withal; for these Hanseatic burghers can wade above their bald-ricks in rixdollars, say our Leith shippers. So, then, thou art of Flanders?"

Willing to deceive him a little, Konrad nodded.

"I guessed thou wert a Fleming," replied the yeoman, laughing, "and so my heart warmed to thee; for they are all stout men and true. Mass! my own mother, who now sleeps at St. Mary in the Lows, was a Fleming of the house of Wigton, whose forbear, Baldwin le Flem yng, came from thy country in the days of St. David, to take knight's service, as I doubt not thou meanest to do."

Konrad again assented to his garrulous companion.

"Then there will be work enow for thy sword by Lammas-tide; for the stout Earl of Bothwell is about to make a royal raid into Clydesdale."

"Saidst thou Bothwell?" ejaculated Konrad, in a thick voice, and glancing hastily at Anna, who was now buried in a profound slumber, with her face concealed in her mantle.

"Yea, Bothwell—one of our queen's prime favourites; but there will be many a lance broken, and many a steed left riderless, ere he shall traverse all the windings of the Liddle. By St. Mary! but they must keep sharp watch and ward at the gate of his castle of Hermitage; for by this time, I warrant, the troopers of John of Park have all been riding by moss and moor."

"Who is this John of Park, of whom I hear so many speak, either with hatred or applause?"

"The chief of the brave clan Elliot, and long Lord Bothwell's mortal foe."

"Then would to Heaven I could meet this John of Park!"

"Hah!" exclaimed the countryman, whose eyes sparkled; "and for what end?"

"That under his banner I might have some chance of meeting Bothwell in his armour, lance to lance, and horse to horse. O God! thou alone knowest how much I have suffered at his hands, and what I have to avenge!"

"Is it thus with thee?" said the Scot; "swear that thou dost not deceive me."

"By all that is holy, I swear!"

"Good. To-morrow I shall lead thee to John Elliot of Park, who needeth much a few such spirits as thee," replied the other, in the same low tone under which the conversation had been maintained.

Here a clatter of horses' hoofs in the adjoining wynd, together

with the jingle of steel bridles and two-handed swords, announced the arrival of more important guests.

"Now here cometh the Earl of Morton and his swash-bucklers—a pest on them! muttered the countryman, instinctively grasping his cudgel; while the bluff host and his buxom better-half bustled about in a high state of excitement, dusting the long oaken table, adjusting the fire, placing fir buffet-stools, and trimming the long candles that flared in the tin wall-sconces.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE EARL OF MORTON.

ATTENDED by a train of forty armed horsemen, this potent noble had arrived.

His men, as they dismounted, placed their long and unwieldy lances against the wall of the inn yard, and set about stabling their steeds with ready activity. Followed by Archibald Douglas, laird of Whittinghame, and Hume of Spott—two gentlemen of his retinue—this factious, proud, and ferocious lord, whose name is so infamous from the dark and bloody share which he took in all the deep intrigues and civil broils of that unhappy period, entered the hall of the hostelry; and certainly, from the smile that spread over his handsome features, curving his fine mouth, and lighting up his brilliant hazel eye—and from the dignity of his aspect, and the magnificence of his yellow damask doublet, embroidered with gold, his purple velvet trunks, which were slashed with white and edged with point d’Espagne, where they joined his hose of Naples silk—the politeness with which he removed his black beaver, with its long white feather, and on entering saluted the hostess with a kiss, and the host with a thump between the shoulders—no one, we say, who saw his general aspect and bearing, would have recognised the same savage and avaricious noble, who, as it was commonly said, “never spared man in his vengeance, nor woman in his lust”—who murdered Captain Cullen for possession of his beautiful wife—who poisoned the Regent Mar to secure the regency—who hung sixty men, as a pastime before breakfast, at Leith Loan—and who was yet foredoomed to die on the scaffold for the greatest of all human crimes.

Adam Ainslie bowed and bowed again, and Lucky Ainslie

curtseyed, in concert, a dozen of times, so well as their corpulent figures would permit.

"How dost thou, stout Adam?" said the Earl, merrily, as he took his seat at the highest part of the chamber board. "Save us! but this meat smelleth savourily, and my evening ride hath given me a wolf's appetite. By the rood! mine host—(pest upon these old oaths of papistry, but how they stick to one's fancy!)—thou wearest noble hosen," continued the Earl, jocosely, as, with his walking-cane, he poked Adam's preposterously bombasted trunk-breeches. "Dost thou know that the Lord Bothwell and other gallants aver, that thy gude-wife keepeth all her bed and table napery stuffed into them?"

"Your lordship is pleased to be merry," simpered Dame Ainslie, placing stools for the Earl's jackmen, who came crowding in with all their iron paraphernalia clanking, and dimmed with summer dust; and a terrible clatter they made with their long spurs, gigantic boots and gambadoes, long swords and jeddard-staves, as they took all the best places at the hearth and table, hustling into the background the countryman and his two companions.

Awakened by the uproar of their entrance, Anna clung fearfully to Konrad's arm; and he remarked that their new acquaintance kept as much as possible in the background, and wore his grey plaid high up on his weatherbeaten visage.

"Hast thou no city news, Master Adam?" said the Earl. "Thou knowest that one might as well bide at the bottom of a drawwell as in that lonely tower of Dalkeith. How stand the markets, and how like our burghers their new provost, the stout knight of Craigmillar?"

"By my troth, Lord Earl, there is a southland yeoman ben there who ought to ken mair of market stock than I. The queen's bidding at Lithgow makes the toun dull and cerie; for the second spiering, I may say auld Sir Simon is liket right well, for he showeth small mercy to mass-priest and papist; gif they be found within the Portes, they dree a douking in the Nor' Loch for the first offence, and a clean drowning in Bonnington Linn for the second. His riders had a lang chase nae farther gane than yesterday, frae Wardie peel to the Braid's burn, after a mass-priest, Sir James Tarbet, who had been found lamenting over his broken idols in the chapel of St. James-by-the-sea; but I grieve that they failed to catch him."

"Beware thee, Adam!" said the knight of Whittinghame, "or thou mayest get a broken head for broaching such free opinions in an hostelry. The head of antichrist is still floating above the current of public opinion."

"Hath Monsieur de Rambouillet, the new French ambassador, arrived?" asked the laird of Spott.

"He landed yesterday at the New Haven from Monsieur de Villaignon's galley; and, preceded by the heralds and bailies of the town, was conducted to Willie Cant's hostel in the Kirkgate of Leith, close by St. Anthony's gate."

"I marvel mickle that he came not to thee, good Adam."

"I marvel mair," added the host, testily; "for there is no an hostel in a' broad Scotland, and that's a wide word, where there is better uppitting baith for man and beast than the *Red Lion*; beside, 'tis a clean insult to the gude toun his lying at a Leither's hostel; but I owe this to a leather-selling bailie in Niddry's Wynd, who I outvoted in the council anent the double and single-soled shoon, that made sic a stir among the craftsmen. Ken ye, my Lord Earl, on whatna errand Maister Rambooly hath come hither?"

"Some new popish league, I warrant," said the laird of Spott, curling his grisly beard. "'Tis said that the Hugonots, jealous of such a body of Switzers being marched into the Isle of France, are resolving upon open war."

"Thou mistakest, Spott," replied the Earl, with a dark frown. "Gif the best man in France came hither on any such devil's errand, I would slit his tongue with my own dagger. He hath come from Charles IX., to bestow on King Henry the collar of St. Michael the archangel. Her Majesty comes from Linlithgow in three days, and we shall have the ceremony of installation at Hclyrood thereafter."

"She will be here in three days, the Queen—hearest thou, Anna?" whispered Konrad. She pressed his hand in reply, and drooped her head upon his shoulder; and the heart of Konrad sickened at the reflection, that the action was prompted only by the abandonment of despair.

"St. Michael's collar!" continued the laird of Spott; "the king should kneel on Rizzio's gravestone at this notable investment. Doth it not smell of popery and brimstone?"

"So the godly Maister Knox openly affirmit in a sermon preached this blessed day," said dame Ainslie, turning up her

saucer-like eyes at the soul-stirring recollection thereof; "preached—ay, in the High Kirk, (named St. Giles by the idolaters,) and he advisit the crafts to hurl the stanes of the street upon Rambooly, as the son of antichrist."

"Master Knox should beware, and bethink him that the persons of ambassadors are sacred," replied the Earl; "but on what other points did he touch in his notable discourse to-day?"

"Oh! he spoke in a way whilk was rapturous and soul-feeding to hear, anent the abomination of singing idolatrous carols at Yule-tide, the great sin of singing ought but psalms, and of all loud laughter and ungodly merriment, whilk becometh not poor sinners like us, in the slough of despondency. He railed at the Queen and the Lord Darnley—the one for her obstinate papistrie, and the other for his wicked life—and then he spoke o' the reiving bordermen in general, and John o' Park in particular, on whom he fulminated a' the curses that ever were crammed into a cardinal's excommunication, as being the strongest and most desperate thief in a' the south country, since puir John o' Gilnokie dree'd his dreich penance from King James."

"Said he aught of the Lord Bothwell?"

"Yea, my lord—that he had taken a hawk from an ill nest."

"Meaning his espousal of a popish woman of the house of Huntly," said Morton. "Well, said he aught of *me*?"

"Nay, my lord—Heaven forefend! Art thou not one of his boon and stedfast friends?"

"Right—he would not talk of me," replied the fierce noble, with one of his deep smiles; and, striking his walking-cane on the floor, an involuntary custom of his, added, "Well, then, master hosteller, let us to supper, for I am ravenous as a hawk, and this noble baron of beef seemeth done to a single turn. If this strange gentleman will so far favour me as to deign—"

"Excuse me, Lord Earl, but I have already supped," replied Konrad, bowing with the distant air of one who wishes to be undisturbed and unrecognised. Morton's pride and curiosity were piqued.

"Thou art English, I think, by the fashion of thy beard, and, doubtless, hast a passport from the marshal of Berwick. I will pardon the bluntness with which thou declinest my courtesy, and will add, that thou mayest find the shadow of my banner a good protection, if the quarrels between the dainty queens of

these realms end in blows; for our little dame looks sourly upon thine, deeming her little else than a false bastard, and base usurper."

"Thou art mistaken, Lord Earl. I am not an Englishman."

"Then what manner of man art thou, fair sir? thou sceest I have a restless curiosity. A stranger?"

"At thy service, noble lord. I understand thou art the great Earl of Morton—the foe of my foe."

"At the Scottish court each man is foe to every one else. I am, in fact, a *little* Earl compared with such a tall fellow as Bothwell. But I may easily be the foe of thy foe, seeing that the half of broad Scotland would readily drench my doublet in Douglas blood, gif they could; but," he added with hauteur, "who is thy foe?"

"James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell!" replied Konrad in the same manner, for he was displeased by the peculiar accentuation.

"Hah! is it so! Thou art a bold fellow to mention that name otherwise than in a whisper, for it findeth an echo every where now. Knowest thou not," he added, with a glance of ferocious scorn, "that the white horse of Hepburn is now bidding fair to swallow the crowned heart of Douglas? I ask not the cause of thine enmity to this man, but if thou wishest an opportunity of seeing him in his helmet, follow my banner for one month or so; for I tell thee that the heather is smouldering on our Scottish hills, and ere long 'twill burst into a red and furious flame."

"Excuse me, potent Earl," replied Konrad, for at that moment the countryman plucked him anxiously by the sleeve "excuse me, for I am in some sort pledged to another."

"Please thyself, a-God's name! and now let us to supper."

CHAPTER XXXI.

MORTON TURNS PHILANTHROPIST.

"BLESSED be the Lord for all his gifts;
Defied the deil and all his shifts;
God send us mair siller—*amen!*"

Such was the grace, which, with half mockery and half gravity, the Earl of Morton, who acted the rigid presbyter and stern reformer merely when it suited his own fancy or peculiar ends, commenced the repast which Adam Ainslie's pantryman

had arranged upon the long oak chamber-board, as a table was then named.

The upper end was covered by a cloth of damask, flowered with red silk; the lower was bare; the guests of rank were furnished with knives and spoons of silver, with glasses of Venetian crystal, delft platters, and pewter trenchers. The lower had only wooden caups and luggies—quaighs and spoons of horn—the great saltcellar forming the grand point of demarcation between the two classes of society who were to partake of the same meal, at the same board, in the kindly fashion of other years. The Earl and his gentlemen sat above; their rough-visaged troopers, unhelmeted, but still wearing their corselets and gorgets, swords and gambadoes, sat below it, closely, side by side, on buffet stools and wooden benches.

They were accommodated with porridge and luggies of sour-milk; a handful of prunes thrown into each platter, with cheese and cakes of *mashlum*, (flour made of ground peas and barley,) and horns of ale, formed their evening fare; but the savoury baron of beef, a pasty of powts, (or muirfowl,) a pudding of plums and spices, with flasks of choice Canary, Rochelle, and Bordeaux, at only sixpence or ninepence Scots the pint, garnished the upper end; and to this early supper, for which *our* late dinners are now a substitute, this jovial company sat down, just as the four old bells of St. Giles rang the hour of nine.

“’Tis savoury meat this, Mistress Ainslie,” said the Earl; “and it well deserved a better blessing.”

“Whence hadst thou it, Lueky?” asked the Knight of Whittinghame, a grim and bearded man; “for here is what I would call the prick of a lance.”

“A true Border mark, by Mahoud!” added Hume of Spott.

“Ye say true, sirs; it may be a gore-mark,” replied Dame Ainslie, curtseying; “for ken ye, the beast was the best of a drove of four hundred, lifted in Nichol forest by John of Park, whose riders sold it to my gudeman in the fleshmercat.”

“English fed, by the rood!” said the bearded knight, cutting down another slice. “Here is another goad-mark! I warrant me, John’s pricklers had been sorely pressed by the English captain of Bewcastle, or the lances of the Wardenrie.”

“These wild powts are right tasty, host of mine,” said the Earl; “whence come they?”

"From the muirlands about the toun, my lord. They are thick as locusts on the braes of the Nor' Loch and Wardie muir. One crossbow shot brings down two at once in the feeding time."

From a nook, in which she had hitherto sat unseen, Anna had surveyed, with a terror which she could scarcely repress, the number of armed men who crowded the apartment. There was a reckless, daredevil aspect about them all; their armour was rusty, and their other attire well worn; in grisly profusion, their beards and whiskers fringed their weatherbeaten faces, which were all more or less stamped with ruffianism; for Morton, notwithstanding the placid suavity of his manner, was as oily a ruffian as ever drew a dagger—and, instead of his rural vassals, he generally preferred to be attended by a band of paid "wageours," as those military desperadoes were named, who swarmed throughout Scotland after the wars between the Congregation and Mary of Lorraine had ceased.

"Konrad," said she, tremblingly, as she clung to his arm; "let us leave this place—"

"For whence? — the wayside? — to be exposed to the midnight dew, and wild animals, perhaps?"

"Surely any place is preferable to this. The faces of these men terrify me!"

Ere Konrad could reply, the Earl of Morton, who had acute ears for such matters, on hearing the soft voice of a woman, bent his keen dark eyes towards where Anna was shrinking into the shadow, formed by a projection of the wall. He divined her sex in an instant; but with his usual cunning concealed this discovery.

"'Tis a pretty lad, this, sir stranger!" said he to Konrad, kindly. "Is he thy page, or thy brother; for he cannot be thy son?"

Konrad hesitated a moment, and then replied—

"My brother, noble lord! as thou mayest perhaps see by our resemblance. We have the same fair hair, and the same light eyes."

"Thou art come hither, thou saidst, to bear a lance in some knight's train. Dost design thy sickly brother for such rough work?"

"Not at present, my lord. He has been over-tenderly nurtured for saddling horses and scouring armour. I would

rather leave him to bear the fardingale of some noble lady, could I meet with such, while I push my fortune in the camp."

"So far I may have it in my power to befriend thee," rejoined the cunning Earl, with a sly wink at his two companions. "Come hither, my boy, and let me see thee."

Thus commanded by this terrible peer, Anna felt herself impelled to obey; and she approached the Earl, whose long beard appalled, while his keen dark eyes seemed to penetrate the most secret thoughts of her palpitating heart. He took her by the hand; and one glance at its fair soft fingers and beautiful form, together with the pallor of her changing cheek, and the timidity of her downcast face, convinced him that a very bewitching woman was concealed under that boy's plain doublet and mantle.

"That will do, boy—seat thyself," said he, lest his companions, the dissolute lairds of Spott and Whittinghame, might make the same discovery. Morton formed his plan in a moment, and resolved by open force, if not by secret fraud—a course he usually preferred—to obtain possession of this fair foreigner. He again addressed Konrad.

"Thou knowest me, fair sir—I believe?"

"Yes, noble sir, to be the most powerful of the Scottish peers."

"After the great Earl of Bothwell," said Morton, with mock humility. "I will place thy brother in the service of a noble lady connected with the Court, where he will be daily in the presence of her Majesty the Queen, if thou wilt trust me so far."

"Lord Earl, I cannot find words to thank thee!" replied Konrad, touched to the soul by this sudden kindness.

"Pest!" said Spott, "his fortune will be made. Thou knowest our Queen's partiality for strangers and outlandish people."

"Earl Morton, were I not pledged to another (and I never break my word even to the most humble), thy standard alone would I follow, to requite with my sword—"

"And to whose pennon art thou pledged?"

Here the peasant plucked Konrad by the mantle, and whispered, "Say John of Park, and they will hang thee from that rooftree!" But Konrad was relieved from the dilemma by Douglas of Whittinghame exclaiming with a hoarse laugh—

"Ha! ha! here is James of Morton, the lord of the lion's den, turning philanthropist—ha! ha! ha!"

"Can thy brother not speak for himself?" said the Earl.

"The boy is timid and bashful."

"The women will soon teach him impudence."

"Excuse him, noble sir—"

"Say I am thankful," whispered Anna in a broken voice, while her tears fell fast; "for though grieved to the heart at parting from thee, dear Konrad, the protection of one of my own sex is so necessary, that—and then to be near the Queen, that she may hear my mournful story! Oh! what will I not risk? Yes—yes! to this great lord say that I thank him from my inmost soul, and will accept his generous offer."

"And what, may I ask, is the name of the noble lady who is to receive this boy as a gift?" asked Konrad, after he had complied with Anna's desire.

"The Dame Alison Craig," replied the Earl. "She dwells close by here, a few doors up the wynd, in a house that was once a convent, but is now adapted to more useful purposes. It hath been reformed—ha! ha! She is a lady of fair repute, and keepeth open house for the rich. By my beard! I know not what would become of Messieurs the Ambassadors of France, Spain, and Savoy, and all the gay chevaliers and signiors of their suites, in this gloomy city of psalms and sermonising, but for Dame Alison's suppers and balls."

Though Konrad did not understand this speech, he partly detected the sly expression of eye with which it was accompanied; but, in his Scandinavian simplicity and honesty of heart, he never imagined it was an infamous courtesan the treacherous Earl was praising; and, pleased with the hope that Anna would so easily obtain access to the Queen's presence, he once more thanked him, briefly and sincerely, and, after the grace-cup had been handed round by the hostess, the guests prepared for repose.

The Earl and his gentlemen were conducted to chambers in the upper regions of the lofty hostel, the host marshalling the way with a flambeau; but their jackmen lay on the hearth, on the benches, and under the hall tables, with their steel caps for pillows, and their swords and axes beside them.

Touched with the melancholy that was impressed on Konrad's handsome face, and with the singular beauty of the seeming boy who accompanied him, the hostess offered the brothers, as she deemed them, "a snug box-bed in the guest row, bein and cosy,

gif they would accept of it—nae difference to be made in the lawing.”

Though Anna understood little of the Scottish woman’s language, with quick perception she divined, by Konrad’s confused expression, the nature of the invitation, and a blush burned on her face. He hastened to remove it, by hurriedly declining and, wrapped up in their mantles, they took their repose on the wooden benches as well as their sad thoughts would permit them ; while, coiled up in his grey maud, with a hand on his poniard and his bonnet drawn over his face, their first acquaintance, the countryman, lay snoring melodiously beside them, with his red-eyed terrier keeping watch and ward by his side.

CHAPTER XXXII.

JOHN OF PARK.

GREY morning was breaking, and its light struggled through the barred windows of the hostelry, edging with cold lustre and bringing into bold relief the harsh and fierce features, the muscular figures, and uncouth accoutrements of Morton’s bearded troopers. They were still sleeping on the hard oak planks when the peasant stirred Konrad, and whispered—

“Fair sir, I am about to depart. If thou art still in the mood to follow John of Park to battle and foray against Bothwell—arise, and come forth !”

“I am ready,” replied Konrad, feeling for the purse that hung at his girdle.

“Nay, nay, heed not the lawing ! I will settle with our host’s yeoman of the pantry, and thou canst do me service another time. Come softly forth ; for I wish not to disturb these blood-hounds of the House of Morton.”

Rising gently, the young man clasped on his steel cap, and gave a glance, full of sorrow and anguish, at Anna’s fair and sleeping face, over which he drew the skirt of her mantle, and, praying that Heaven might take her under its peculiar care, hurried away.

“’Tis better—oh, yes !—’tis better,” thought he. “She is now under more powerful protection than I could afford her ; and, in the whirl of war and strife, I may (for a time, at least)

forget that hopeless passion which her presence is turning into madness."

While his new friend and one of the drowsy servitors, whom he had roused from his snug nest among the hay in the loft above the stables, were removing the ponderous wooden bar of the pend or archway, Konrad felt a hand laid lightly on his arm; he turned, and met Anna's tearful eyes fixed sorrowfully and pleadingly on his.

"Wouldst thou really go without bidding me one kind adieu?" she said tenderly, in the language of their native land.

"I deemed it better, Anna. Partings are ever painful, and I hoped to see thee soon again."

"My heart is oppressed by fears and misgivings—"

"Let them cease, I pray thee; but oh! above all things, carefully preserve thy disguise. Remain with this noble; he is great and powerful, and in his train, three days hence will doubtless find thee in the presence of the Scottish Queen. Once there, thou art safe. Throw thyself at her feet, and there pour out thy tears and thy sorrows together. Mary of Scotland, say the people of every land save her own, is good and gentle, pious, compassionate, and kind. Thou art sure to triumph. Farewell, Anna! may our blessed Lady, whose intercession is never sought in vain, protect and bless thee!"

"Thou wilt come and see me sometimes, Konrad—at Court, I mean; for surely I must remain there after my story is heard!"

"And forget old Norway?" said Konrad, with a sad smile.

"*Gammle Norgé!*" reiterated Anna; "ah, never! but I would wish that some great lady, fair, beautiful, and rich, should see thee, and love thee, and, and—"

"What?"

"Make amends for the worthless heart thou hast lost."

"Never, Anna!" responded the young man in a troubled voice, while he regarded her with a gaze of love as deep as in the days of yore. "That can never be—Konrad's die is cast;" and, kissing her hands, he sprang through the archway, and, with his mind in a tumult of confusion, hurried after his guide.

A sense of sadness, desolation, and doubt, were ever uppermost in his thoughts, and absorbed all his faculties.

There were none stirring in the city at that early hour; the streets were silent and deserted; and grimly in the grey morning the grated windows of its lofty mansions, tall, and strong,

and spectral, with their turnpike towers, crow-stepped gables and Flemish roofs, frowned over the narrow way.

"What time of the morning is it, thinkest thou, for I never could afford me a pocket-dial?" said the peasant, as they descended St. Mary's Wynd.

"About two hours of matin-prime yet."

"Matin-prime hath not rung for these ten years and more from the steeples of Edinburgh," replied the other, with a dark look; "but please God a day shall come, when all the services of our blessed church, the *sexte* and *none*, the *vesper* and *nocturnal*, shall toll from every steeple in broad Scotland."

"Shall we meet John of Park in the city?"

"Marry, come up! thinkest thou he values his poor head so lightly that he trusts it there? Though of a sooth to say, 'tis worth more than I thought it; for there, on yonder gate, we will find that the lords of the land offer a hundred unicorns of gold for it. I never could read a line myself; but I heard a certain notary's servitor, a dainty youth in black buckram and a white ruff, read it to the gaping rabble yesternight. A hundred golden unicorns! ha! ha! John of Park, my poor knave! look well to thy harpman, lest some day thou findest it grinning on yonder spikes!"

With a boisterous laugh, his guide directed Konrad's attention to a huge placard posted on the Porte of St. Mary. This barrier, which extended from east to west across the Pleasance, and gave access to the Wynd and Cannongate, was removed in the seventeenth century.

The paper, which was surmounted by the rude engraving of a thistle and crown, with the initials M.R., purported to be the offer of one hundred unicorns for the "notour rebelle, traitor, and murtherour, at ye Queen's majesties horne, John Elliot, umquhile designate of Parke." Imprinted by Thomas Baskandyne, one of the earliest Edinburgh printers, whose establishment was near the Netherbow.

As they left the city behind, pursuing the path that skirted the royal park, and (by the same narrow way that the good St. Margaret had rode on many a day to her gifted well) led towards the old collegiate church of Restalrig, with the ruined dwellings of its banished prebendaries nestling among the old orchards of the monkish days—the sun came up in splendour from his burnished bed in the German sea, and the summits of the city,

and of the dark-green hills that overhung it, were reddened by the joyous light. Up, and farther up, soared the god of day in his glory; and Gulane Hill, St. Baldred's isle of rock, and the volcanic cone of Berwick Law, were mellowed in the morning haze.

Leaving the bridle-path that led to the dwelling of the factions and turbulent Lord of Restalrig, they entered upon the dreary waste named the Figgate Whins, where, from time immemorial, the monks of Holyrood had grazed their flocks of sheep and cattle. Bordered by a low and sandy shore, and uncheered by a single habitation, this wide and lonely waste extended from the western ramparts of Leith to the chapel of Magdalene—a little oratory by the seaside, nearly four miles distant. The fragment of an ancient Roman way traversed the moorland, which was still as death, save where a few cattle browsed on the patches of grass; and each of them had a sprig of ash-tree tied with red tape to their horns, as a charm against disease and witchcraft. The gurgle of the Figgate burn flowing into the ocean, whose crested waves rolled in light on the yellow sand—and the cawing of the rooks, that were wheeling aloft from their nests in the ruined oratory—were the only sounds that broke the stillness; for Konrad, oppressed by his own sad thoughts, did not converse much—and his companion had also become somewhat taciturn and reserved.

This muir was studded by great thickets of dark-green whin, and mossy knolls, marking the roots of gigantic oaks, the remnants of that great forest whose shady dingles had once spread from the hills of Braid to the ocean, and which many a time and oft had echoed to the trumpets and timbrels of the Emperor Severus and Julius Agricola. There were deep hollows, moss-hags, and sandpits, by the wayside; and, altogether, the place, as they progressed, seemed to become so fitted for outrage, murder, and robbery, that Konrad began to view with suspicion the tall and brawny fellow who had led him thus far, and who marched on a pace or two before, with his grey plaid waving in the wind, his bonnet drawn over his face, while with his knotty staff he hewed in a swordsman-like fashion at the broom-bells and thistle-heads that bordered the Roman causeway.

"Is it in this place we are to meet the knight whose pennon I am to follow?" asked Konrad.

"Ycs!"

"And how saidest thou he was named?"

"The Laird of Park! a name at which men cock their lugs in Liddesdale."

"And where is he now?"

"Before thee!" said the other, drawing himself up, and raising his bonnet from his broad and manly brow. "I am Sir John Elliot of Park!"

"Thou!" exclaimed the young Norwegian, stepping back a pace, with a frown of anger and surprise, that his helmet partly concealed. "Peasant churl! how canst thou be that brave knight whom all men characterise as the foe of the great Earl of Bothwell, though thou mayest well be the strong thief he is said to be!"

"A salmon from the pool, a wand from the wood, a deer from the hill, or a drove of nolt from our English foemen, are thefts that no man hath need to blush for."

"By St. Olaf! I will rather forego my chance of meeting Bothwell in battle than follow such as thee. Nay, nay; fallen as he is, Konrad of Saltzberg hath not yet come so low as to seek suit or service from a low-born peasant!"

Long and loudly laughed the borderer at this remark, till his sunburnt face grew purple.

"Dost thou think, when I ventured into Edinburgh to learn how matters were likely to go with us in Liddesdale, I would enter with my pennon borne before me, and sound a trumpet at its gates? By St. Mary! no—and I care not mickle whether I don a blue bonnet, or Naples beaver, or a steel basinet, provided it keeps my head on my shoulders for a time. But tarry a moment, gentle sir; and, peradventure, thou wilt acknowledge there may be worse leaders than Joek Elliot of Park."

On approaching the chapel and bridge of Mary Magdalene, he placed to his mouth a small bugle of ivory, exquisitely carved and mounted with silver, and blew one clear low blast, that rang along the sandy shore, and immediately a knight's pennon and the glittering heads of sixty bright lances appeared above the broom, as they were uplifted in the sunshine, and there rode down the opposite bank a band of moss-troopers, armed, after the Scottish border fashion, in jacks of leather covered with little iron plates, steel gloves, gorgets, and basinets, and having two-handed swords slung from their shoulder-belts. As they approached the bridge-end, their strong, fleet, and active horses,

though covered with dew and dust, seemed still fresh and active.

"Behold my pennon, fair sir!" said the Knight of Park, pointing to the scarlet bannerole, which bore on a golden end a *flute*, the pastoral cognisance of the Elliot clan. "And these are a few of my Liddesdale lads; so, if thou art ashamed to follow the one in the ranks of the other, here we part, and in all friendship I say—God keep thee!"

"Nay—I crave pardon! I pledged my word to serve, and will keep the pledge."

"Then be it so. Ho there, Edie o' Earlshope!—Lauchey wi' the lang spear!—my horse and armour!" cried the knight, throwing down his bonnet and plaid; and immediately a strong and beautiful horse, stoutly, but plainly, bitted and caparisoned, bearing on its saddle a bundle of armour, was led forward by the laird's henchman, the said Edie, a muscular but spare sample of the thorough-bred moss-trooper.

His eyes and hair were of the deepest black, his face was long and lean, and by constant exposure had been tanned to the colour of mahogany. The bristly moustaches that overhung the clasps of his battered morion, were like iron wire. His powerful form seemed a model of muscular strength and activity, but his legs were considerably curved by constant riding; his armour was well worn, and by frequent use, rather than care, the grasp and pommel of his long and ponderous sword, that hung from a chain over his shoulder, was polished as brightly as if by a cutler's hand. Though Edie was merely the chartered portioner or crofter of Earlshope from the laird, there was much more of the outlaw than the farmer, and still more of the ruffian than the soldier, in his aspect.

"Park, thou art right welcome among us!" said he, with the respectful familiarity of a Scottish vassal to his lord in those days, when the interests of the people and their superiors were *one*. "What may be the tidings in yonder city?"

"Such as will cause sharp swords and sure watches to be kept in every tower that looks down on the Liddle, good gossip."

"Wow, laird!—and what be they?"

"The Lord Warden of the three marches, with four thousand lances in his train, is about to lead a raid among us, and meaneth to pay me such a visit as King James did John of Gilmokie."

"Weel—I carena a brass bodle!" growled the moss-trooper,

as with a ready hand he buckled on his leader's coat-of-mail, and assisted him to mount. "I havena had a straw growing on Earhope-rigs since Lammas-tide was 1560; nor a cow in the byre, save what I won in fair foray;—sae, gif we take to hill and moss again, we canna be mickle the waur."

"By the blood of Broomholm!" swore his chief; "gif I take to moss and moor, let the Lord Warden look to it, for I may chance one day to whet my lance on the ground-stone of his own castle of Bothwell! Hast thou a horse for my friend?"

"By my faith have we—for ten friends!" replied the henchman, pointing to a troop of led horses, whose halters were fastened to troopers' bridles.

"And where got ye these nags?"

"Ou! just in the outsteadings owre the hill yonder, where I took a turn wi' Dandy Dumpie and Langspear, between the night and morning, to keep us frae wearying when waiting on ye. But as the crofters may be missing their cattle about this time, and set the countryside astir, 'twere wise to make use of rowel and rein till the Lammermuir is between us and the sea."

"Our Lady!—yes; for ere noonday this bridge will be echoing to the tramp of Bothwell's bands, who bring with them the Comptroller's cannon, to batter down every obnoxious peelhouse in the wardenrie, and my poor little tower of Park in particular. Mount, friend Konrad, and let us begone; for we have to ride fast and far ere we breakfast yet!"

Konrad sprang into the saddle of the charger proffered him—(a strong and active bay)—and rode forward by the side of his new friend, to whom he was completely reconciled, on beholding that his pennon was borne by a gentleman—and that his armour, though plain and unornamented, was of the finest steel, and every way such as became a knight. He rode with a jedwood axe resting on his thigh; and his visor, which was lighted by two horizontal slits, clasped down.

Passing the turreted house of Crichton of Brunstan, who had taken such a leading part in the recent Reformation, they struck into a narrow horseway, that, crossing the Esk by a ford, led to the hill of Carberry—and, as they ascended, the districts of Newton and Inveresk lay spread at their feet like a beautiful map. The waves were rolling in silver and blue around the Inch and the May—St. Adrian's gifted isle—while the point of Elie, the peak of Kincairg, and all the shore of Fife, was

mellowed by distance into faint and shadowy tints; but when John of Park and his troop of lances diverged along the heights that are crowned by the old tower of Falside, whose ruined turrets still overtop their grove of firs, the broad and beautiful bay of Preston opened out before them, dotted by the dark lug-sails of northern fisher-boats, and shining in golden light—yellow almost as the long expanse of sand that edged its ample margin.

Accustomed to the savage landscapes of his native Norway, there was a soft charm in that varied and magnificent panorama which for a time won Konrad from his melancholy thoughts.

An amphitheatre of fertile hills, and rich copsewood of the darkest green, rose gently upwards from the encircling shore, till their long blue undulating line stood defined distinctly and clearly against the pale and azure horizon. From the strongholds of the Lords of Winton and Dolphinton, and many a baronial dwelling, whose lofty turrets and crested gateway have long since crumbled into dust—from many a thatched cottage and many a snug home-farm—the smoke was rising amid the summer woods, to mingle with the morning mist, and melt in thin air.

Afar off, like a speck at the edge of the distant sea, a sail was visible, marking the faint line where sky and ocean blended into one; and Konrad gazed at it long and wistfully. It might be bound for his northern home; and for a time his eyes, his heart, and his wishes, followed it. But he soon lost sight of the sea and the distant capital, on entering the moorlands that lay to the southward of Falside and Carberry; for the experienced border knight and his moss-troopers, to avoid the Earl of Bothwell's line of route, had resolved, by taking a circuitous and solitary way, to gain, unseen, their native wilds of Liddesdale.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE CONFLICT IN HERMITAGE GLEN.

ANXIOUS to forget both Anna and his Countess, Bothwell hastened to plunge into the ardour and excitement of that wild and predatory warfare which was then maintained on the frontiers of the two countries. The memory of the wrong he had done his wife, stung him more than those endured by Anna;

for he deemed his marriage with her a jest, a nullity, while his espousal of Lady Jane had been as solemn as the Church could make it.

He solved his conscience, too, with the recollection of Anna's facility and faithlessness to her former lover, and made it an excuse for endeavouring utterly to obliterate from his mind all memory of his intrigue with her—for he deemed it nothing more. And now, when finding himself rising into eminence and power at court, he only viewed with fear her probable escape from Noltland, and the custody of Sir Gilbert Balfour; and that fear engendered a sentiment very much akin to hatred—for to such a bitter feeling will the most passionate love turn at times.

The complaints of the Earl of Bedford, lieutenant of the English marches, concerning the incessant forays of the border clans, caused the queen and her ministers to resolve on holding an assize, or court of justice, at Jedburgh, upon the 27th of August, and the nobles, barons, and freeholders of the adjacent shires were summoned by writ to meet their majesties, Henry and Mary, on the 23rd, at Peebles; while the magistrates of the former place made preparations to accommodate such a vast retinue of men and horses.

While Bothwell continued warring on the borders, the approach of harvest caused a postponement of the royal visit till the 8th of October, when the Queen joined him at Melrose, *not* alone, or nearly so, (as we are falsely informed by Buchanan,) but attended by her whole court and council, her archer guard, the officers of justice, and a strong armed force, as her father, James V., had come there thirty years before. King Henry, either from cowardice, caprice, or whim, chose to absent himself, and go no one knew whither, but as the queen shrewdly guessed, to visit one of his innumerable inamoratos.

After capturing many of those moss-troopers who were known to be lawless and predatory, who harried the beeves of their countrymen as well as those of the English, and delivering them to all the brief severities of Jeddart justice, especially our late acquaintances, Edie of Earlshope and Lauchey-with-the-lang-spear; after storming and dismantling many of their dwellings—those strong but solitary peelhouses which are either situated on rocks almost inaccessible, in the depths of forests, or among the pathless wilds of the border morasses—the im-

petuous Earl turned the whole tide of war and justice against the great master-reiver of that district, John of Park and the clan Elliot, who had hitherto successfully eluded his desultory operations.

Careless of his future fate, and glorying in the dangers of the wandering and Bedouin-like life of the Scottish moss-troopers—now garrisoning some solitary peel that overlooked many a sylvan strath and silver stream; now hiding in some unfathomed cavern; now stabling their steeds among the hags of some deep moss, from whence they issued all in their armour, with uplifted lances, on the terrified troops of the wardenrie—the young Norwegian engaged with ardour in every desperate foray and attack on which John of Park dispatched him; and his daring, his activity, and indomitable hardihood, made him the byword and the idol of the wild spirits among whom his fortune had cast him; but they knew not that, in every action, in every deed of arms and essay of danger, one thought—one hope—was ever uppermost in his mind, to come within a lance length of the Earl of Bothwell.

On the other hand, that gallant noble having heard of this new desperado, with whose chivalry all the borders were ringing, and also of Anna's flight from Noltland, became doubly anxious for his capture, if not for his destruction.

Now many a time the reflection came home to his mind, how bitter were the dregs of the cup of deceit—and now he found how one false step required a hundred to repair it.

These foes had their long wished-for interview sooner than they anticipated.

On hearing of the queen's arrival at Jedburgh, Bothwell had ridden from his stately castle of Hermitage to visit her, and was returning, accompanied only by his gossip and boon companion, Hob of Ormiston. They were both lightly, but well armed, and splendidly mounted; for, by the ancient way, the castle of Hermitage is nearly twenty-five miles distant from Jedburgh.

The latter, a populous town, then twice the size of Berwick (as a letter of the English protector Somerset informs us), with its lofty abbey tower, its embattled ramparts, and six great bastle-houses, had been left behind; and the sun was setting when the Earl and his friend penetrated into the bleak and mountainous district of Liddesdale.

The vale of the winding Hermitage, with its fertile borders of

fine holmland and rich copsewood, was then growing dark, and the sun's last rays were fading on the summits of Tudhope-hill and Millenwood-fell, whose steep and silent outlines stood in bold relief against the cold blue sky of October. This region was then almost without roads, and destitute of other inhabitants than the fox and the fumeart, the deer and the eagle. The country was swarming with exasperated outlaws and broken men of every description; and thus the Earl and the Knight rode fast without exchanging a word, for they knew that they ran considerable risk of being roughly interrupted, ere they reached the gates of Hermitage.

"By cock and pie!" grumbled Ormiston, under his barred aventayle, as he breathed his horse a little; "'twas a rash deed and a perilous, to come on this hellicate errand alone, like two knights of the Round Table, when we might so easily have had a hundred good lances at our cruppers."

"Heed it not, good Ormiston!" laughed the Earl, who was in excellent humour with himself and everything else; for Mary had received him so affably, and thanked his good service so graciously. "Heed it not, I pray thee! If thou reachest the gate of Hermitage with a whole skin, thou canst stuff it well with wine and baked beef; but if thou gettest a Lockerby lick between this and its gates—why——"

"Thou must pay the masses for my soul, as I have not had a plack in my pouch since Michaelmas, and I doubt mickle if Mass John of the Priestthaulgh will credit me."

"'Tis said that John of Park wears a corselet of Milan inlaid with gold, and worth a hundred angels. 'Twould be a rare prize for thee, did we meet him here by the Birkwoodshaws."

"By the mass! I hope not; for I have no wish to lose that which will not make the laird of Park one jot the richer—my poor life—which he will have lances enow to send to the devil in a twinkling!"

"If we *are* to be intercepted," rejoined the Earl, "by broken knaves, I wish they would show face while our horses are fresh, and we could run a course on the level sward here with some pith and spirit."

A pause ensued, during which nothing was heard but the dull tramp of the steeds on the grassy waste, its echo from the mountains, the hard breathing of the riders, half suppressed in the hollow of their helmets, and the clinking of their mail.

Suddenly the Earl drew up; for an abrupt turn of the path traversing that beautiful valley, which is ten miles in length, brought them close to a band of some twenty moss-troopers, riding leisurely down the hill side in full harness, with their steel caps and lofty lances glinting above the hazel bushes that tufted the mountains. They were trotting in a circle, and goading on a herd of fifty or sixty fat oxen, which they had harried from the holme of Canonbie Priory, which had been ruined and destroyed by the English, on their retreat from Solway Moss, twenty-four years before.

"Cock and pie!" exclaimed Ormiston.

"Devil take thine oath of cock and pie!" exclaimed the Earl, testily. "It cometh in on all occasions—grave as well as gay. Seest thou not that yonder is a band of Liddesdale lances, and we have now a chance of being overborne, slain, and thrown into the Hermitage, with a stone at our necks, to make amends for our late hard justice at Jedburgh."

"The knaves will scarcely dare to slay thee, who art the Queen's lieutenant; and warden of the three marches; but I doubt mickle if their scruples will extend to Hob Ormiston."

"Think not they will spare either of us, gossip of mine; and thou biddest fair to feed the crows, as the pelicans in thy banner do their young."

"I will be right well content to die in my helmet, if I cannot redeem my life with that of the best knave among them!"

"Then come on, a-God's name!" cried the Earl; and, brandishing his sword, he rode straight towards two of the moss-troopers who had advanced to reconnoitre; while the remainder, spurring at full gallop, and goading on the plunging and maddened herd of cattle with their sharp lances, pursued their path at full speed towards the wildest district of the mountains.

Leaping their horses across the mossy and reedy margin of a mountain runnel, the Earl and his companion rode leisurely to within twenty paces of the other horsemen, and then, for a minute, they all steadily surveyed each other by the fading twilight of the valley.

"These are tall fellows, and their bright armour would seem to announce them gentlemen of name," said the Earl. "Mass! is not that John of Park in the flute's steel?"

"And our Norwegian!"

"Now, by Heaven!" exclaimed the Earl, grasping his long

sharp sword, and adjusting his iron gloves; "our bout will be a tough and a bloody one—man to man! 'Tis good chivalry this for a moss-trooping knave. Have at thee, Sir John of Park! I am James, Earl of Bothwell."

"Come on, lord warden, and welcome to a Liddesdale lick!" exclaimed the moss-trooper, putting spurs to his steed. "Thy head or mine, for a hundred unicorns! ha! ha!"—and rushing on, they encountered hand to hand.

Konrad, who had been most anxious to meet Bothwell in a solemn and vengeful single combat, finding himself thus anticipated, turned the whole tide of his wrath upon the gigantic Ormiston, whom he engaged with greater determination than fury.

The Knight of Park wielded his light Jedwood axe with such skill and dexterity, that the fourth blow broke Bothwell's tempered blade like a crystal wand, and left him defenceless.

The powerful borderer pressed on, and, with his axe upraised, was about to hew the Earl down, through head and helmet, to the neck, when the latter suddenly reined back his horse, blew the match of a poitronal (so named from its having a square butt, and being discharged from the breast) and fired! The large bullet passed through the neck of Park, piercing like silk his jointed gorget; he fell forward supinely on his horse's mane, and rolled upon the turf with the blood gushing through the bars of his aventayle.

Leaping from his horse, Bothwell bent for a moment over the wounded man, whose broad bosom heaved convulsively under its steel case; but for a moment only, till, inspired with new strength by the agonies of death and despair, he made one sudden and serpent-like bound, and, swinging his Jedwood axe by both hands, dealt the Earl a furious blow on the helmet, and again sunk prostrate on the turf. The tempered head-piece partly saved the warden, who reeled a pace or two, half blinded by his own blood, for the blade had penetrated and slightly wounded him.

"Base felon!" he exclaimed, compressing the throat of the dying moss-trooper with his armed heel, "dost thou surrender now?"

"Yes—my soul to God! but *never* my sword to thee," he muttered, and expired.

Faint and giddy, the Earl leant against the saddle of his

horse, while the combat was waged fiercely between Konrad and Ormiston, whose horses were alternately beaten down on their haunches by the fury of the conflict; but the skill of the former was completely overborne by that of the latter, when united to his vast muscular power. Often they paused and panted, and surveyed each other with tiger-like ferocity, while their warding weapons were pressed together, and then again they engaged with all the fury of two mad bulls.

Bothwell watched the fray with interest, for he had a firm friend to lose on one hand, and a dangerous foe on the other; thus he was doubly anxious for the success of Ormiston, who, after a long pause, suddenly, by one tremendous back-stroke, that fell like a thunderbolt on the helmet of his younger and more slender adversary, unhorsed and stretched him motionless on the turf, where the strong and ruthless victor sprang upon him like a demon, with his vengeful blade withdrawn for the death-thrust.

"Nay, nay!" said the Earl, staying the hand and weapon. "To Hermitage! to Hermitage!—its gates are strong, and its vaults are deep enow to hold a wilder thief than this. To-morrow I will hold a court in the hall, and consign him to the dule-tree for foraging in the wardenrie. I would rather he should perish thus, by the hand of justice, than by thine or mine; and now let us hence, ho! lest yonder band of knaves leave their quarry under escort on the muir, and return to the rescue."

"And John of Park's dainty suit of mail, and his corselet, worth—how much didst thou say?"

"A pest upon thee, man! I did but jest; yet thou speakest like a rascally Lombard Jew. Is this a time to think of such things? There, hide the carrion under yonder bush, and I will send John of Bolton down the glen, with a few lances, to bring thee the suit of mail, and me the wearer's head. But assist me to bind this knave on horseback, and then, away!"

The Earl was immediately obeyed, and the half senseless captive was lifted on his horse, bound to it by the scarfs of the victors, who took each his horse by the bridle, and following the windings of the glen and stream, whose clear surface was now shining in the starlight, set off on the spur for the famous old border stronghold of Hermitage, which had been built in the thirteenth century by Walter Comyn, Earl of Menteith.

Blind and faint by loss of blood, the Earl almost sank from

his horse on reining up at the eastle gate, where he was received into the arms of Hepburn of Bolton, and other faithful retainers, who bore him to his apartments.

Alarmed on beholding his dark hair clotted and his features disfigured with blood, when his helmet was removed his attendants conducted him to bed, and despatched a horseman to the village of Castleton for the leech of the district, Mass John of the Priestthaugh, a friar of the suppressed Priory of Canobieholm; while an express, announcing the severe wound of the Earl, and the death of John of Park, was immediately despatched to the Queen at Jedburgh, where she was then residing, and occupying a small house that still remains in a sequestered street of that venerable burgh. This edifice is styled (no one knows why, says the Magister Absalom) the House of the Lord Compositor, and some of the tapestry with which it was adorned for her occupation is still preserved.

The moss-trooper who bore the message, Pate of the Prickinghaugh, tarried at every peel-house and cottage in the vale of the Hermitage, to have his thirst quenched and announce the fall of John of Park, the "prettiest man" in all the wide borders; but Pate drained so many horns of whisky and ale, that, by the time he reached Jedburgh, he reversed the order of matters, and created a tremendous sensation among the courtiers by announcing that John of Park had been victorious, and the great Earl of Bothwell slain.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE PIT OF HERMITAGE.

IN the middle and darker ages, the first chambers of every Scottish castle were a range of vaults, arched with stone, rising from walls usually ten or sixteen feet in thickness. In these the winter stores were kept; but there was *one*, generally the lowest, the darkest, and most damp, which was emphatically named the PIT; where the lord of the barony kept the most refractory of his vassals, and the most hated of his feudal enemies; for every Scottish peer and lesser baron had the right of pit and gallows attached to his fortified dwelling.

In a hundred castles we could name, the pit is immediately

below the hall—in Hermitage it was lower still ; and though, perhaps, it was no worse than many others in Scotland, to poor Konrad, who, on the day (or night, for both were alike there) succeeding the combat in the valley, found himself a captive therein, never, as he imagined, did human cruelty devise a den more horrible. But he knew not of the *oubliettes* of Linlithgow and St. Andrews.

He found himself buried, entombed, and lost in pitchy darkness.

The atmosphere was close, and damp, and still—so very still, that he heard the regular and monotonous plash of a drop of fetid water, that fell at intervals from one of the long stalactites that hung pendant from the low slimy arch of the vault.

He was cold as death, and miserable, and broken in spirit.

The memory of Park's fall, and his own capture, seemed like a dream ; all was chaos and confusion in his mind. Altogether, he had but an indistinct sense of existence ; and after a time became without one idea of where he was. A torpor was stealing over him, conduced by the monotonous plash, plash, plashing of the before-mentioned drop into the little pool below it ; at times, it seemed to echo through the vault like the fall of a goblet of water, for to this only sound his sharpened sense had become painfully acute.

Still the benumbing torpor continued gradually to steal over him, and at length he slept on the damp, moist floor of that frightful vault, which yet survives, and is recorded in the Scottish annals as being the scene of a terrible event.

He slumbered ; but even then his mind was active and sleepless. His last waking thoughts were of Anna ; his first dream was of his home—and old Norway, in all its stern beauty of wood, and rock, and mountain, rose before him. He saw his native hills, with their blue and hoary summits of thunder-riven rock, towering far into the azure sky in shadowy masses ; and he could trace the rough paths where he had often pursued the bear and the roebuck, diminishing to threads in the distance, as they wound up precipices overhung by the gloomy pine. He saw grey Bergen on its chasmed cliff, and Christiana's rock-bound bay. Old and familiar faces were before him ; loved voices were in his ear ; and, with a sob of astonishment and joy, he awoke.

A lambent and flickering light was burning near him ; like a

great glow-worm, it glimmered in the fetid atmosphere. He thought some spirit of the darkness was visible: to this day the Norse are full of such superstitions; but though his eyes (after being nearly twelve hours in such intense darkness) ached on beholding the lamp, he soon perceived the dim outline of a human countenance peering into the gloom, with its eyes shaded by a hand.

It was the saucy face of French Paris, Bothwell's favourite and most trusted page, to whom he had given particular charge of Konrad, that none other should approach him, or become acquainted with the important secret he possessed.

"Where the devil art thou?" he asked; "for I cannot see the length of my own nose in this accursed pit. O ho! good-morrow—I see thee now. So thou art the rider who was with John of Park when he so sorely wounded my lord, who now lieth in deadly peril."

"If thy lord is the Earl of Bothwell, I would thank God for the tidings, if I dared to thank him for aught so unchristian. How dares he to confine me in such a place as this?"

"Lest thou shouldst slip through his fingers like a Teviot eel," replied the page with a grin. "Thou art not a Scot, by thine accent; how camest thou to be involved with my lord, the Earl, in *that* affair—thou wottest of what I mean? I am somewhat curious about it. 'Twas I who conducted thee to his countess, and then to the postern door at Bothwell castle."

"True—I remember thee now."

"Why art thou here?"

"By a combination of circumstances over which I had no immediate control; because I knew not the merits, and saw not the issue, of this border war, in which I had taken service; by destiny—or the guidance of an evil spirit—which you will."

"Holy Paul!" said the page, retreating a pace or two, but immediately advancing again, for he was burning with curiosity to learn the Earl's secret. "If thou talkest thus I must have thee burned for sorcery!"

"Thou! And who art *thou*?" asked Konrad, with more surprise than scorn.

"One whose favour may set thee free, but whose anger may leave thee here to rot," replied the pert page, assuming an aspect of dignity. "Dost thou not know that thy life is in my hands, and that instead of leaving thee the choice food and good wine

sent thee by the Captain of Hermitage, I may keep them and leave thee to perish, even as the Knight of Dalhousie perished here two hundred years ago. Ha! dost thou see these relics?" continued the young ruffian, raising his light and revealing a few human bones, and part of a jaw, lying amid the little pool before mentioned, and amid which the monotonous plash of the drop constantly made concentric circles to glitter and expand.

"What terrible history is concealed here?" exclaimed Konrad, with a lowering brow.

"A history well known alike in Lothian and Liddesdale," replied the page, drawing nearer him with a horror he could not repress; "and a foul shame it is to Christian men, that these poor bones have lain here so long unburied. But verily the place hath few tenants."

"Whose are they?" asked Konrad, with deep interest.

"As Heaven hears me, the spirit that once tenanted these poor remains was that of as brave a knight as ever rode to battle!" rejoined the page, with a sudden earnestness; for the aspect of the mouldering bones, lying amid that green and slimy pool, and the gloom of the black dungeon, were not without producing a strong effect on his feelings and fancy. "Listen! It was in the year of our Redemption 1341, when David II. sat upon the Scottish throne. In those days, when the southern Edwards, with all the chivalry of England, the tribes of Wales, the kerne of Ireland, the knights of Normandy, Guienne, and Aquitaine, and all the lanzknechts of Flanders and Almayne, strove for many a year on many a bloody field to win broad Scotland to their crown, this stronghold of Hermitage belonged to one of the bravest of the Scottish patriots, Sir William Douglas, the Lord of Liddesdale, whose feats of arms had won him the title of Flower of Chivalry. His dearest friend and most loved companion in arms was Sir Alexander Ramsay, Lord of Dalhousie, on the wooded Esk, one of those brave knights whose mailed bosoms had formed in all these wicked wars the best bulwarks of Scottish liberty. In every field, Douglas and Dalhousie were side by side in rivalry and love; at the rescue of Black Agnes, the Lady of Dunbar, and at that brave battle on the Muir of Edinburgh, where the banner of Guy Count of Namur was beaten to the earth, and his Flemish bands destroyed.

"It chanced in these wars, that Ramsay, having won by

storm the strong castle of Roxburgh, King David bestowed on him the sherifffdom of that district, an office which, by ancient usage, had ever appertained to the lords of Hermitage and Liddesdale.

"From that hour a deadly and a mortal hatred possessed the heart of Douglas; and on his knees before the altar of St. Bryde, in Douglas-dale, he made a deep and impious vow of vengeance. Hearing that the new sheriff was administering justice in the kirk of the blessed Mary at Hawick, he entered the town at the head of his vassals; and the Knight of Dalhousie, having no suspicion of injury from his old friend and comrade in arms, was easily taken at vantage, wounded, and overpowered.

"Stripped of his armour, and loaded with chains, he was dragged through many a wild moss and moorland to this strong fortress, and *here* into this deep vault his captor thrust him down, manacled and bleeding with all his rankling wounds, and here the doomed man was left to die!

"It is a dark story, and I see thou startest. Here the wounded knight was left to struggle with hunger and with thirst, with cold and with agony. Above the place of his confinement there lay a heap of corn, and through a joint in the arch the grains fell one by one, yet few and far between—even as the water now drops from the same place—and with these he prolonged life for seventeen days, despite the agony of his festering wounds. On the seventeenth he died!

"And here his bones still lie, for the dampness of the vault has preserved them."*

"Rest him, God!" ejaculated Konrad, with a shudder which he could not repress.

"Such will be thy fate, if thou art left here!"

"Whatever Heaven hath in store for me is welcome. I am tired of life."

"Thou snuffest like a Reformer. What! tired of life, and thou so young?"

"'Tis the verity!" responded the prisoner with a sigh; "but what thinkest thou, page, will be my fate?"

"Why, if my lord dieth of his wound, thou shalt assuredly

* Some of these remains were found by Sir W. Scott, and by him presented to the Earl of Dalhousie. He was taken on the 20th June, sayeth the "Black Book of Scone."—*Mag. Absalom*.

hang over Hermitage gate ; if he recovers, thou shalt hang, too, as a disturber of the borders, and be gibbeted somewhere to feed the crows, and frighten thy comrades. So, it is *hang* any way !” added the page, with one of his malicious grins.

A deep sigh, inspired as much perhaps by anger as by grief, heaved Konrad’s breast ; but he made no reply.

“ How now !” exclaimed the page, as through the open door of the dungeon the report of a falconet on the tower-head came faintly down the windings of the narrow stair that led to the vault ; “ that will be a raid of the Elliots or Armstrongs ! They will all be riding to revenge thy comrade, John of Park ; if so, thou wilt soon have company here. But lo, now—eat and drink while thou mayest ; and omit not to bless Sir John Hepburn of Bolton, who sent thee this good fare in lieu of oatcakes and cold water.”

Another and another falconet rang on the bartisan of the great tower of Hermitage, and double-locking the door of the pit, French Paris hurried away.

CHAPTER XXXV

BOTHWELL REVIVES AN EARLY DREAM.

LET us change the scene.

Clad in a rich gown of damask furred with miniver, a white satin doublet, and hose of russet velvet, the Earl was reclining on a well-cushioned settle, or what would now be named a sofa. A velvet cap was drawn well over his brow, to conceal the bandaging that retained certain cooling and healing herbs upon the scar which the moss-trooper’s axe had inflicted, and which Mass John of the Priestthaug had carefully dressed about an hour before.

The great noble was in a dreamy mood ; for he, too, had his visions, like poor Konrad, who occupied the terrible pit where Dalhousie died, some eighty feet below. The boom of the brass falconets was barely discernible in the remote apartment of the Earl, so massive were its walls, so close its wainseoting, and so thick the tapestry that lined it ; and he slept on undisturbed by the warlike sound.

He dreamt of Anna ; her upbraiding eyes were fixed on his,

and he heard her voice like a confused murmur in his ear; every expression of her face was before him as of old, by turns tender and love-like, haughty and sad. Then her features changed, and rapidly as thought became those of his unhappy and almost forgotten Countess, in all her pallid beauty, her infantile smiles and black beseeching eyes. Anon they changed again, and, fading or altering into others, grew more and more like those of Mary the Queen, with her pure broad open brow, and deep, dark, thoughtful eye; her aquiline nose and haughty nostrils; her smiling mouth and dimpled chin. A sound awoke him.

He started, and arose to find the very face of which he dreamt before him; the same eyes and laughing little mouth, so full of archness and drollery.

It was, indeed, Mary the Queen, in her little lace coif, her velvet hood and ruff, her long diamond stomacher and long far-dingale, just as we see her in the old paintings at Holyrood. She was leaning on the arm of her sister, the stately Countess of Argyle; the Earl of Moray, Hob Ormiston, and French Paris, were grouped, with several ladies, a pace or two behind, and all were attentively regarding Bothwell, whose strong figure, cased in his close-fitting vest and velvet hose, seemed a model of manly symmetry and grace, as his features, dark, regular, and classic, did of that kind of beauty which we find in the pictures of the old Italians—the white and martial forehead, with its short black curly hair, the straight nose and jetty eyebrows, the curved mouth, and well-defined chin.

“Madame—Madame! is this a dream?” exclaimed Bothwell, starting from his couch, and, though giddy with debility, kneeling before her with a reverence almost unknown in the Scottish court since her father’s days. “To what is my house of Hermitage indebted for the unmerited honour of this sudden visit? Have the Liddesdale thieves been at Jedburgh gates?”

“Oh, Jesu Maria!—no,” said the Queen. “I hope that if all the Elliots came, and the Armstrongs too, that with Erskine’s archer-guard and the burgesses, we could have maintained yonder town, with its tall bastel-houses, till the lord warden sent his lances to our rescue.”

“Then hath the English marshal of Berwick or his prickers dared”—began the Earl again, as with a kindling eye he looked round for his sword.

“Nay, nay, my dear Earl—thou thinkest ever but of blows

and battle. Thou hast none other than thy dull-witted messenger to thank for a visit from all this good company."

"Pate of Prickinghaugh!"

"Ah, *mon Dieu!* the same," replied Mary, laughing at the name. "Well, this Maitre Preekinhaw brought us tidings that thou wert either dead or dying. So, setting out with a small train from Jedburgh, with my noble brother, the Earl (here Bothwell, with an eye that was full of irony, exchanged a profound bow with Moray), I rode hither, intent on learning in person the truth or falsity of this sad news; and that I might, if they were so, avenge on the whole sirname of Elliot, the loss of the only Scottish peer that would draw his sword at the command of his sovereign. So you sec, Monseigneur Bothwell, that whatever the Protestants say of poor Mary Stuart, she is not ungrateful for service promptly rendered."

"Oh, madame!" said the Earl, in a thick voice, as he clasped his hands and bent his eyes on the ground, "you overpower me! I never deemed thee otherwise than something angelic, and such I find thee now."

"Ah!" replied the Queen merrily, as she seated herself; "every pretty woman is so in the eyes of a brave gallant!"

The Earl bowed profoundly; but how little did the gay and thoughtless Queen divine the secret sentiment that made his voice to tremble, and his eye, that was ever so clear, and calm, and dark, to flash and sparkle!

While French Paris and little Calder served round confections, refreshments, and wine, in slender Venetian glasses, fruit on silver salvers, and milk-possets in crystal jugs; and while the grave Earl of Moray, the burly Hob of Ormiston, and the courtly young Lieutenant of the Archers chatted with the ladies at the further end of that long and stately chamber, the lofty and painted casements of which overlooked the steep bank on which the double donjon of the castle rose, and from its height commanded a view of the far-stretching Hermitage, winding like an azure snake through the green and pastoral valley, the Queen, with all that vivacity and French gaiety of manner which were so natural to her, was detailing the particulars of that celebrated ride to Hermitage which was to bear so prominent a place in all the histories of her actions, and which has always been adduced by her enemies as a proof of what had never entered her mind—a

passion for Bothwell, to whom she had never evinced any other sentiment than gratitude.

On hearing the alarming tidings of his death, as brought by Pate of Prickinghaugh, she had immediately set out from Jedburgh, and, accompanied by her brother Moray and a slender retinue, penetrated into the wild and mountainous district between Liddesdale and Teviotdale—a journey twenty-five miles in length, obstructed by every local difficulty; steep rocks and deep morasses, foaming waters, peat hags, and slippery scaurs—to her a *terra incognita*—where the solitary peels of moss-troopers and savage outlaws, perched like eagles' nests on the hill-summits, overlooked the pastoral glens below. In an almost impassable morass her horse sank to the saddle-girths; and she was only rescued from her perilous condition with the utmost difficulty. The place is still named *The Queen's Mire*.

Of all these past dangers she spoke with a raillery that made yet more charming her great beauty, which the exercise of so long a ride in the pure morning air had greatly enhanced; and the Earl, as he gazed upon her, thought in his secret heart that never was there a being more beautiful and glorious.

Anna and his Countess were alike forgotten!

Mary, the dream of his boyhood at the gay Tournelles—Mary, the bright, the beautiful, and joyous girl of seventeen—rose on his memory as he had seen her, when bestowed in marriage on the sickly Dauphin. Now that being, so long and so hopelessly his idol, was before him, expanded into one of those magnificent women that are believed to exist only in the most enthusiastic visions of the poet and the painter; she was with him, seated by his side, in his own stronghold of Hermitage, amid the wilderness of Liddesdale.

They were looking into each other's dark eyes, and Bothwell felt his heart tremble; for thoughts both wild and strange were floating through his mind. But they faded away when again he gazed on the pure serene brow and clear full gaze of Mary, who, in her heedlessness and conscious rectitude, never dreamt of the view the Earl was taking, and the censorious world would yet take, of that unfortunate visit to his castle of Hermitage.

"And so it was the falsity of this drunken jackman, Pate of the Prickinghaugh, that led your grace into this deadly peril!" said Bothwell. "Sir John of Bolton," he added to his friend, who stood near, and who, at a silver chain, wore an embossed

key of the same metal, indicative of his office as Captain of Hermitage, "thou wilt look well to this, and see if a mouth or two in the pit will cure him of exceeding in his cups for the future."

"Nay, nay!" exclaimed the Queen, turning pale, "God and Saint Mary forbid! If I forgive him, surely thou wilt mayest."

"Your Majesty will excuse me—I am sufficiently rebuked by that glance of displeasure. But this man is only a rascally border pricker."

"True, my lord," said Hepburn; "but one over whom thou hast no control."

"How! doth he not follow my banner?"

"Yes; but merely as an excuse to plunder the Elliots on the one hand and the Armstrongs on the other. He brings twenty tall troopers, all well lanced and horsed; his kinsman, Watt of the Puddingburn, brings as many more from his tower on the Liddle; and these would each and all be notable disturbers of the wardenrie, did it not suit Pate's humour at present to follow your banner."

"Droll personages!" said the Queen; "but, Lord Bothwell, thou shouldst feel nought but gratitude to this moss-trooper, when it is to his mistake alone thou art indebted for this visit from me."

"I was upon the point of saying so," rejoined the Earl, who felt, he knew not why, a confused sense of awkwardness and timidity, hitherto unknown to him; and this caused pauses in the conversation which served to increase his confusion; for the more he taxed his mind for gay topics, the more seriously he became embarrassed.

"Fidelé," said the Queen, in her softest tone to a favourite Italian greyhound, which, with a silver bell jangling at its neck, leaped gracefully upon her brocaded dress. "Fair Fidelé, of all the world thou alone lovest thy mistress best; and in good sooth I may well love thee better than the world, for thou lovest me for myself alone. Ah! Monsieur Bothwell, thou knowest not how dearly I love all little dogs, and parrots, and pigeons, and every little animal. I have quite a large family to feed every morning at Holyrood. Monsieur my uncle, the Cardinal de Guise, has sent me a beautiful cage full of red-legged partridges; and my kinsman, the Marquis d'Elbœuff, has brought me from madame my aunt, the good Prioress of Rheims, a vase full of the most beautiful little fishes, which I mean to put into Lochmaben."

I fear thou wilt think all this very childish in me, who am a queen—and queen of such an austere people;” and, while shaking a bunch of grapes at the leaping hound, she began to sing—

“Bon jour, mon cœur,
Bon jour, ma douce vie !
Bon jour, mon œil,
Bon jour, ma chere amie !”

She ceased suddenly ; the hound looked up wistfully in her face, her eyes filled with tears, and Bothwell seemed disturbed.

“Your Majesty is thinking of France?” said he in a low tone.

“Nay ; I am thinking of poor David Rizzio,” replied the Queen sadly. “’Twas a song of his. But I have heard it elsewhere.”

“You loved much to hear this old man sing.”

“Oh, yes ! for the long-forgotten memories, the buried hopes, and all the tenderness of the soft French and softer Italian airs called up within me—drew me ever away from the bitter present to brood upon the happy past, or to muse upon the dubious future. Oh, thou canst not know how dearly I love music ! Music and sunshine—I wish I was a bird ! Poor old Rizzio !” she continued, with sparkling eyes. “Though indifferent in person, he was the best in the suite of the Count de Mezezzo, the Savoyard Ambassador ; and was a gentleman of such attainments as few in Scotland, save thyself, can boast. How my heart fires within me, when I think of the dark and savage noblesse who destroyed him ! So illiterate and unlettered ; and yet these base barons, not one of whom could sign his own barbarous name, were the men who broke my gallant father’s heart, who debarred my mother the rights of sepulchre, and who have dared to become the spiritual judges of my people, levelling in the dust the church that was founded on a rock, and against which not even the gates of hell were to prevail !”

“For Heaven’s sake, madame, hush !—walls have ears !”

“*Les murielles ont des orielles* ; it was a saying of *ma bonne mère*, Catherine de Medeis,” said the Queen ironically.

“Nothing that is said in Hermitage shall go beyond its walls,” replied the Earl, who was pleased to find that the courtiers at the lower end of the room were intently viewing the landscape, or observing a game at Troy between the Lady Argyle and the flippant page, French Paris, who was a great proficient. The

whole group was partly concealed by a loose festoon of arras that divided the chamber. "But," continued the Earl, who despised Rizzio as an upstart favourite, and, like all the nobility, regretted his death but little, "the destruction of a royal favourite is nothing new in Scotland. There was the raid of Lauder brig, where Angus and the nobles hanged half King James's Court over the parapet in horse-halters—but I beseech your Majesty to think of these things no more."

"True! few can recall the past with pleasure, and Mary Stuart least of all," replied the Queen, whose melancholy eyes filled again with tears; and then Bothwell knew that she was thinking of the weak and profligate debauchee, on whom, in the first flush of youth and love, she had thrown away her hand, and heart, and crown; "so pray, my good lord, let us talk of whatever is most pleasing to yourself."

"Then I must talk of—thee."

"Ah!" rejoined the Queen, with one of those artless and engaging smiles which a pretty woman always assumes on receiving a compliment; "and do you really think often of me?"

"Madame," replied the Earl in a low voice, while his colour came and went, and he could hear his heart beating; "I have thought more than I have ever dared to tell."

"Jesu Maria!" laughed the Queen, clapping her white hands; "have you lost your tongue?"

"Nay, madame—my heart!"

"That is very serious—but search for another, Monseigneur Bothwell."

The voice of the Earl trembled as he replied, "I want no other but—*thine*!"

At this daring avowal, a blush crossed the Queen's cheek; but, supposing that the Earl was merely pursuing a joecular strain of gallantry, she replied—

"O fie! remember, Lord Earl, that at Versailles, the old hunting-lodge of Francis I., (ah! that is long—oh! very long—ago), thou didst taunt me with being without a heart."

"I did, as I now remember me," said Bothwell, over whose brow a shadow passed. "That was ere your grace became Dauphiness—yet it seems as if 'twere yesterday. But you *have* a heart, madame—one that is warm, affectionate, and well worth the winning."

"Well!" replied Mary, rising with a cold and haughty smile, as she thought of Darnley; "it is already lost and won."

"By one who appreciates its value?"

The Queen gave him a glance full of reproach, for she felt all the taunt contained in the quiet query.

"I hope so!" she said.

"Dear madame," replied the Earl, in the same low, earnest voice; "you can neither deceive yourself nor me by these replies. The Lord Darnley is my foe; but you are aware that I speak more in a sentiment of dutiful love towards your Majesty, than enmity to him who stirred up John of Park, and the whole clan Elliot, to slay me. On him thou hast sacrificed a love the bravest of our Scottish peers, and the proudest princes of Europe—Charles of France, Carlos of Spain, and the Archduke of Austria—have sued for in vain. Oh, madame!" continued the Earl, with pathos in his voice, while his cheek flushed and his eye kindled as he recalled the boyish love of his early day, when he had first seen Mary at the court of France—"I know that the human heart can love truly, fondly, and sincerely, but once—and once only. Let that love be blighted or crushed, and all future impressions are but fancies, to be begun with a smile and relinquished without a sigh. Oh, yes, there is an amount of love, of ardour, of agony, despair, that we feel but once, and then we become deadened and callous. Oh! who in a second love ever felt the same freshness, the same depth of anxiety, the same fear, and hope, and joy, that alternately filled his heart in the dawn of that first passion, that grew like a flower in Eden, and fills the whole creation with happiness, rendering us blind and oblivious of all save the object we love?"

"And since when has your volatile lordship known all this?" asked Mary, with her usual raillery.

"Madame, since I first beheld—thee!" replied the Earl; and, borne away by the gush of his old and long-cherished love, he sank on his knee, and pressed to his lips the hand of Mary, over whose fair brow and beautiful face a deep and crimson blush of anger passed, as the shadow of a summer cloud flits over a corn-field.

"Rise, my lord!" she said, with a hauteur that froze her admirer. "Lord Bothwell, thou art in a dream!"

"It was, indeed, a dream," replied the Earl sadly, as he thought of the double vows that separated them for ever. "St.

Bothan help me! a dream of other days, that can return no more! Oh, madame, I pray you, pardon me—”

“I do pardon thee,” replied the Queen, with one of her ealm smiles; but added, significantly, “I think ’tis time we were riding from Hermitage.”

“So soon! after your escape—your fatigue—and when a storm is gathering? See, the peaks of Millenwood-fell and Tudhope-head are veiled in mist.”

“This instant!” replied Mary, with one of those gestures which there was no disputing. “Jane, Lady Argyle, we are about to depart. Sir John Hepburn, summon our train.”

“Permit me, madame, to accompany you. Ho!—French Paris—my armour!”

“Lord Bothwell—in thy wounded state! I command thee, nay!”

“True—true; I thank your Majesty,” stammered the Earl, whose head swam between the effect of his wound and this interview. “But Hob Ormiston, with his train of lances, will see you to the gates of Jedburgh.”

In five minutes more Mary was gone, after being only two hours in Hermitage, as the Lord Serope saith quaintly, “to Bothwell’s great pleasure and contentment.” There was a clatter of horses in the court, a discharge of brass cannon from the keep, and all again was as still in the great and solitary castle of Hermitage as in the pit below it.”

From a window the wounded Earl watched the train of the Queen and her ladies, the tall and mail-clad figures of Ormiston and his men, with their long spears glinting in the glow of the western sun, as they followed the windings of the mountain stream, and traversed the long and desolate dell that led to Jedburgh.

They disappeared in the distance; and then, overcome by excitement and loss of blood, the Earl threw himself upon a couch, from which he did not rise for many days.

On Mary’s return to Jedburgh, a severe cold, caught during this visit to Hermitage, ended in a fever, that was aggravated by a pain or constitutional weakness in her side, of which she had long complained; and, notwithstanding that she lay on a couch of sickness so deadly, that Monsieur Pieauet, her physician, despaired of her life, the conduct of Darnley was singularly cruel and ungrateful. A letter of the French am-

bassador shews, that he treated with contempt the tidings sent to him of the Queen's illness, and that he remained spending his time in idleness and dissipation at Glasgow. It is probable that though his absence wounded her pride, it caused her no great grief, as she had almost ceased to love him.

The Earl of Bothwell, though not without a strong dash of that profligacy which tainted the Scottish nobles in the age succeeding the Reformation, was immensely inferior as a *roué* to Darnley; whose coldness, insolence, and brutality, formed a vivid contrast to the artfully preferred addresses, readily performed services, and gallant demeanour, of the handsome Earl.

A month passed away.

Bothwell remained at Hermitage under the care of Mass John; the Queen at Jedburgh, under the more able hands of M. Picauet, and slowly recovering from her illness. Hob Ormiston, and other barons, guarded her with a thousand lances, while Darnley remained at his father's house of Limmerfield, near Glasgow, wiling away the days in hunting and hawking by Kelvin Grove, and Campsie Fells; and spending the nights in dicing, drinking, and "wantonnesse" in the bordels and hostleries of the Tron and Drygate.

Meanwhile, Konrad continued to be a close prisoner at Hermitage; for the Earl, though urged on one hand by Ormiston to dispatch him by brief border law, was advised, on the other, by the gentle Hepburn of Bolton, to transmit him to the Justice Court.

Thus he wavered; for a sentiment of pity, while it withheld the execution of either of these measures, struggled with a sense of the danger that might spring from the secret his prisoner possessed; and then at times there came a demon's whisper that urged the proud Earl to destroy!

Konrad neither sued for mercy or liberty; but, feeling happy in the nourished hope that Anna was now under the sure protection of the Queen, he awaited with patience whatever fate had in store for him.

Thus day after day rolled on, and he never saw other face than that of French Paris; who, as the most trusted of all Bothwell's numerous retinue, was alone permitted to approach him.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ALISON CRAIG.

POOR Anna! All that she had made Konrad endure by her desertion, was now endured by her in turn, with the additional bitterness that the retribution was merited; and the memory of the last glance of Konrad's melancholy eyes, when he parted with her at the gate, of the hostlery, was indelibly engraven on her mind.

The Earl of Morton, the most treacherous, cruel, and debauched man of that profligate age, had her now completely in his power, and could, when he chose, make her his victim either by secret flattery or open force; he could keep her in some quiet dwelling of the city, or send her to his strong castle of Dalkeith, where she would never have been heard of again; but this godly upholder of the new faith preferred the former and more gentle course.

In St. Mary's Wynd, not many yards from the famous Red Lion, and on the west side thereof, stood a small edifice, having three rows of gothic windows, the upper being more than half on the roof, all grated by half-circular baskets of iron, and having a low-ribbed doorway, bearing on its lintel a pious legend in old contracted Latin.

In Catholic days this had been a convent for Cistercian Nuns, and an hospital founded and dedicated in honour of the blessed Virgin Mary, by some pious citizen, whose name and era local history has failed to record. This hospital was so poor, that its inmates were supported by the voluntary contributions of the good and charitable; its revenues were so small, that the salary of the chaplain in 1499 was only sixteen shillings and eightpence yearly.

The change of manners and religion had wrought their wonders here as elsewhere; for the little Gothic oratory, where the fair Cistercians, in their white tunics, scapularies, and hoods, had offered up their prayers to God, and to his mother their patron; the little hospital, where the sisters of mercy had attended to the sick and infirm; the kitchen, where they fed the poor; and the gloomy dormitories, where they slept on their hard pallets between the nocturnal and the matin prayers—had

all been wofully perverted from such purposes ; for, favoured by the Earl of Arran and other gay courtiers, on the universal plunder of the temporalities, this edifice had been gifted to Alison Craig, a celebrated courtesan, who, though living under protection of the "godly Earl of Arrane," as Knox tells us, in language which we choose not to repeat, yet contrived to be on very friendly terms with many other nobles, some of whom were his deadly enemies.

Though deeming her a lady of high birth, the appearance of Alison Craig did not prepossess the timid Anna much in her favour, when, on the noon of the day after parting with Konrad, she was introduced by Morton with much mock formality. The dame was seated before a little mirror of thick plate-glass inserted in a ponderous oak frame, that nearly filled up the recess of a little window, overlooking what had once been the convent garden, but was now a piece of waste ground, extending to the back of a neighbouring close. The windows at the other end overlooked the wynd, which was then a central and great thoroughfare, being the only entrance to the city from the southern roads.

The apartment was in confusion ; a broken sword and a velvet mantle were lying on the floor, attesting that a brawl had taken place there overnight ; the candles had all burned down in their sockets, and the girandoles were covered with grease ; a close smell of wine and perfume made the atmosphere of the paneled chamber oppressive.

Alison Craig was tall and corpulent, and about thirty-five years of age. Her features, which were not without beauty, were somewhat coarse, and undisguisedly bold and wanton in expression. She wore no other head-dress than her own luxuriant hair extravagantly frizzled, and having a bob-jewel dropping on her forehead, which was as white as daffodil water could make it. She wore a huge double ruff, a long peaked stomacher of damask brocade, a petticoat of prodigious circumference, and sleeves barreled and hooped ; while, contrary to the modest fashion of the time, she displayed very much of a fair neck and full bosom, which the Earl of Morton immediately kissed on his entrance, to the no small astonishment of Anna, who began to think it was the fashion of the country.

A slovenly damsel was rouging the pallid cheeks of the fair Cyprian, whose plump fingers were toying with a rare jewel, that

Morton recognised as one he had frequently seen at the neck of King Henry, whom he knew to be one of Alison's patrons, though a mortal foe to Arran, Chatelherault, and all the clan of Hamilton.

"Sweetheart, good-morrow," said the Earl, running his fingers through the perfumed tresses of Alison. "I have brought thee a pretty page, of whom, as thou valuest the friendship of Morton, particular care must be taken."

"What is the friendship of Morton to me?" she asked with an air of pretty disdain. "Thou seest this bauble?"

"'Twas once that blockhead, Darnley's. Woman, thou holdest that which has been worn by the most beautiful queen in Europe!"

"And may be worn by a queen again, gif this giglet Mary were dead or set aside."

"How?" said Morton, knitting his brow, for the woman's insolence irritated him, "at what hast thou dared to hint?"

"What Darnley has dared to promise—here, ay, here in this very chamber!"

"Go to, woman! thou art stark mad, and he had been drunk, like a fool as he is. But let us not quarrel, pretty sweetheart; for seest thou"—and here the Earl whispered something in the ear of the woman, whose eyes were lighted with a malicious smile as she surveyed Anna. "Thou wilt see to this? I know thee of old, sweet duleibelle—eh?"

"My lord, when thou art good to me, I will obey thy pleasure in all things."

"And now tell me what news are abroad in the city, for I have not been within its gates yet?"

"Nought but Bothwell's expedition to the borders, and the queen's wrath at the lukewarm loyalty and cautious valour of such as thee, and thy boon-fellow the Earl of Moray."

Morton smiled, as he patted her painted cheek, and said—

"Thou art sarcastic and out of humour, sweet mistress; what lackest thou?"

"A runnet of right Rhenish to bathe me in. Thou knowest, Lord Earl, that all the great ladies of our court bathe so; for its powers, say physicians, are miraculous on the skin."

"Thou shalt have the Rhenish, only excuse me, I pray, ever drinking any of that wine with thee thereafter. Anything more?"

"Perfume. I lack some, and must have it from Monsieur Pieauet."

"How! will no other than the queen's physician and perfumer serve thee? Thou shalt have the essences, too, and—"

"A hundred angels of silver, too—eh?"

"A hundred yelling devils!" replied the Earl.

"I will not require thy page with so many attendants."

"Thou art a cunning gipsy," said Morton, grinning under his long beard, and taking a purse from his girdle, where (as pockets were not then invented) it hung beside his dagger. "Here are eighty for thee; and not one devilish tester more can I give, even were it to purchase my own salvation—so, now let us kiss and be friends."

Alison was now in excellent humour; she sang a few snatches of "Gilquhiskar," and "Troly loly Lemendow," two merry old ditties, while she played with Morton's preposterous beard, and acted the coquette, and he affected the gallant—each in secret despising the other. But after a time, relinquishing the frizzling of her locks and adjustment of her Elizabethan pearl bobs, Alison turned her attention to the crowd of jostling passengers, that now, as the morning had advanced, and the port of St. Mary was open, streamed through the wynd.

Meanwhile that Anna, timid, confused, and broken-spirited, in her character of page, had retired a little into the background, Alison Craig was amusing the Earl by quizzing the appearance and gait of every person who passed—handling them with all due severity.

"Marry, come up! look, Lord Earl! yonder goeth Master George Buchanan, in his conical beaver and threadbare cloak, with a great book under his arm. Tantony! but he looketh very rusty to be Director of the Chancery—but lo!" she exclaimed, as a burly country gentleman, in a whalebone ruff, and barreled doublet of green broadcloth, with a great broadsword belted about him, and his lady riding lovingly on a pillion behind him, ambled up the street; "'Tis the old laird of Braid, and Dame Marjory Fairly, his gudewife."

"They are just married, sweetheart—else why ride they so lovingly?"

"Nay! they have been wedded these thirty years, and had two tall sons shot at the siege of Leith, by Monsieur Brissac," replied the lady, with an explosion of laughter. "But the laird is a gomeral, and his dame in her great tub-fardingale—O Jesu!

see yonder gay galliard, with a feather in his hat and a falcon on his thumb !”

“’Tis Master Sebastian, who playeth the viol at Holyrood.”

“Ah ! the Savoyard. And, lo you ! there goeth the Knight of Spott, without a cloak to hide his threadbare doublet. Well ! were I thee, Sir Knight, I would buy me worse garments, or avoid the city. But I warrant he hath spent his last bodle on a can of Flemish beer at the Red Lion.”

“He is a gentleman of my following,” said the Earl with a frown. “His gudesire spent his all in the wars of King James, and fell at Flodden like a true Scottish knight, with his pennon before and his kindred behind him ; his son, else, had been a richer man to-day.”

“Gramerey me ! here cometh Mistress Cullen, too, in her top-knots and flaunters, walking daintily, as if she trod on eggshells, with a lace ruff under her sauey ehin, and her nose in the air. St. Mary ! she wears three bob-jewels while I have only *one* !”

A very pretty woman, whose face was shewn to the utmost advantage by her little white coif, and whose uplifted train displayed her handsome ankles eased in stockings of red silk, stept mincingly up the Wynd ; and as this was a lady with whom Morton had an intrigue, and whose husband he ultimately put to death in furtherance thereof, he assumed his beaver hat and walking-sword, hurriedly kissed Alison, and patted the cheek of the page, saying significantly—

“When next we meet again, little one, I hope to see thee in more fitting attire.”

But as he bowed himself out, by the bright glance of his cunning eyes Anna knew with terror that the secret of her sex had been discovered.

And she was left alone with this dangerous woman, of whose character she was wholly ignorant, though her surprise and suspicion were naturally excited by the too evident lightness of her demeanour. As the worthy Dame Craig knew neither French nor Norwegian, and Anna had no Scottish, the latter was wholly at a loss to make her story known ; and resolved to await in patience an opportunity of ending all her tribulation, by throwing herself at the feet of Mary, which she doubted not to have soon an opportunity of doing, when in the train of a lady who was on such terms of intimacy with the most powerful nobles of the court.

On waking next morning, she found on a chair by her couch, in lieu of the well-worn doublet with which poor Konrad had disguised her, a double ruff of Brussels lace, a peaked stomacher of blue Genoese velvet, sewn with seed pearls, and a skirt of blue Florence silk, covered with the richest needlework; there was a suite of beautiful jewels for her hair; bracelets, and a carcanet of rubies for her neck, all of one set. These, and the entrance of one of Dame Alison's flippant and tawdry damsels, announced to Anna that now all disguise was at an end.

The jewels had been sent by the Earl, who, by force or fraud (but seldom by purchase), had always an immense assortment of such things at his castle of Dalkeith, in the vaults of which he is said by tradition to have buried twelve casks filled with plate, precious stones, and bullion, the plunder of desecrated churches, demolished abbeys, and stormed fortalices.

At ten in the morning he paid her a visit, fresh from St. Giles' church, where, to please the public, he had been compelled to attend one of Mr. John Knox's furious ebullitions "against anti-christ and the belly-gods of Rome," and against that queen and court who were introducing into the land "muffs and masks, fans and toupets, whilk better became the harlots of Italie than the modest and discreet women of Scotland."

The gallant Earl was intoxicated by the air of innocence and purity that pervaded the beauty and saddened manner of his intended victim; and the sentiments she inspired lent a charm to his manner that increased the natural grace of his very handsome person, which was arrayed in a suit of the finest black velvet, slashed with pink satin.

We must make this a brief chapter, says the Magister Absalom quaintly in his MSS., as the scene hath long lost the odour of sanctity.

Confused, silent, and with her eyes full of tears, the helpless and lonely Anna heard all his addresses in the broken French he had acquired among Mary's courtiers, without knowing what they imported, till suddenly the whole danger of her situation flashed like lightning on her mind, and, rising from her chair, she drew back, and with a crimsoned check, a dilated eye that filled with fire, exclaimed—

"Forbear, Lord Earl! I am Anna, Countess of Bothwell!"

Impressed by her air, and thunderstruck by the announcement, Morton stood for a minute silent and irresolute; but so accom-

plished a gentleman and courtier was not to be easily rebuffed; and approaching with an air in which the deepest respect was curiously mingled with impudence and surprise, he led her to a chair—entreated her to forgive him, to be calm, and to tell by what chance he had the happiness—the unmerited honour—of being introduced to the wife of his dearest *friend* in a manner so very odd.

Won by the frank air and oily address of this polished noble, the too facile Anna, with all the usual accompaniments of tears and hesitation, related her story; and Morton heard it in attentive silence, but with a secret glow of pleasure and triumph that he could not conceal, for it sparkled in his dark hazel eyes, and glowed in his olive cheek. But to Anna, these seemed indicative of his generous indignation at Bothwell's faithlessness and cruelty; whereas, the factious Earl felt only joy at the prospect of having it now in his power to stop the successful career of the rising favourite: to set him at feud with the powerful house of Huntly—to bring upon him the wrath of a most immaculate and irascible kirk, and the scorn of a virtuous queen.

"By the devil's teeth, but this is glorious!" thought he; "I must hie me to Lord Moray."

Begging that Anna would compose herself, would be patient, would trust the management of her affairs implicitly to him, and all would yet be well, he left her, courteously saluting her hand, and whispering terrible denunciations of vengeance against Alison Craig if she permitted any one to have access to her, allowed her to escape, or failed to treat her with the utmost respect and kindness.

He then mounted his horse, and accompanied by Hume of Spott, and Douglas of Whittinghame, with sixty armed horsemen, set off on the spur for the mansion of the Lord Moray, the massive tower of Donibristle, situated on a beautifully wooded promontory of the Fifeshire coast, and washed by the waters of the Forth. But it so happened that the intriguing Earl was elsewhere; and, as there were neither post-offices nor electric telegraphs in those days, several weeks elapsed ere those noble peers, and comrades in many a feudal broil and desperate scheme of power, could meet and mature their plans, which, however deep, were ultimately frustrated by the Earl of Bothwell himself, as will be shown in the two following chapters.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

FOUR CHOICE SPIRITS.

A MONTH, we have said, had passed away.

Konrad of Saltzberg still remained a captive in the hands of Bothwell, who was constantly urged by the savage and unscrupulous Baron of Ormiston to put him to death, as the best and surest means of stifling for ever the secret he possessed. But a sentiment of pity for the wrong he knew the captive had suffered at his hands, warmed his generosity, prevented him stooping to so deliberate an act of baseness and cruelty, and saved Konrad for a time.

He dreaded setting him at liberty, and therefore took a middle course; and, resolving to trust the ultimatum to fate, transmitted his captive to Edinburgh, escorted by French Paris and ten moss-troopers, who consigned him to the care of Crichton of Ellick, the queen's advocate, as a border outlaw. While awaiting his examination before the council, he was placed under the sure surveillance of Hepburn of Bolton and the Royal Archers, in the old tower of Holyrood, which had been built by John, Duke of Albany.

By this time the Queen had recovered from her illness; and, guarded by her archers and a thousand border lances on horseback, arrived at Edinburgh on the 24th of November, and resided alternately at the Palace and at Craigmillar, a castle three miles south of the city. Though his wounds were barely healed, Bothwell with a small retinue, immediately left Hermitage, and followed her to the capital, while Moray and Morton were plotting and laying their schemes in Fifeshire.

Thus were all the parties of our drama situated on the 24th of November, 1566, when this chapter opens.

The night was cloudy and dull; a cold wind swept in gusts through the narrow streets, and not a star was visible, for one of those dense mists, named a *harr* by the Edinburghers, had risen from the German Sea, and settled over the city. The High Street had long been deserted by all save four belated revellers, who were muffled in their mantles, and wandering about without any apparent object.

At midnight, the aspect of the greatest thoroughfare of

Edinburgh was then particularly desolate and gloomy. It was destitute of lamps, though paved with huge square stones, as an old writer informs us, and bordered by edifices "so stately in appearance, that single houses may be compared to palaces." Many of these mansions rose from stately arcades of carved stone. One great arch at the head of Merlyn's Wynd was profusely decorated; and before it lay six stones, marking the grave of the great city paviour, John Merlyn, who was so vain of his having been the first to causeway the High Street, that he requested to be buried beneath it. Another magnificent edifice, built in 1430, adorned by gothic niches, containing the effigies of saints and warriors, reared up its imposing facade near Pæbles' Wynd, and Hugo Arnot, in whose time it was extant, avers that no modern building in the city could be compared with it.

Dark and shadowy, looming like ranks of giant Titans through the flying mist, the striking outlines of these fantastic mansions overshadowed the way; and under the gloomier shade of their groined arcades, our four friends, muffled and masked, wandered to and fro without having any decided object in view.

They were no other than the Earl of Bothwell, the Marquis d'Elbœuff, and their friends, Hob of Ormiston, and John Maitland, lord of Coldinghame, brother of the famous Lethington, who, though a gay *roué*, held the offices of Lord Privy Seal, and Prior of Coldinghame—the Priory he held *in commendam*. They had all been drinking joyously overnight at Adam Ainslie's, and had now sallied forth bent on brawl and mischief, despite the burgh acts, which were very stringent regarding "night walkers;" for the bailies had enacted that each night at the hour of ten, after forty strokes had been given by the great bell of the High Kirk, (the old name of *S^t. Giles* had been voted idolatrous,) any person found walking in the streets should be summarily imprisoned during the pleasure of the provost; while for the better maintenance of a nightly watch, the city was divided into thirty districts, over each of which were two captains, a merchant and craftsman, empowered to keep the peace of the burgh by dint of jeddard axe and Scottish spear.

But our four gallants had sallied forth prepared for every emergency. Bothwell was completely mailed in the fashion of

the time, all save the head, on which he wore a blue bonnet, and his legs, which were defended by his bombasted trunks and quilted hosen. The Marquis d'Elbœuff was similarly accoutred, but wore one of those strong and plain salades, which had only one horizontal slit for the eyes, and he bore on his left arm a light French rondelle or buckler; but Ormiston and Coldinghame wore only pynce doublets, or undercoats of defence quilted with wire, and so called from having been first worn by *pions*, or foot-soldiers. They were all disguised by black velvet masks and dark mantles, under which they carried their swords and daggers.

"How goeth the night, Marquis?" asked Bothwell, as they stumbled along the dark street, breaking their shins against the outside stairs that then in hundreds encumbered the way.

"By St. Denis!" lisped the French noble in his broken dialect; "I know not, for I never was rich enough to buy me a horologue."

"How! is thine appanage of Elbœuff in the Rumois so poor?"

"'Tis past midnight," said Coldinghame; "I heard St. Giles toll twelve."

"A bonny hour and a merry for thee to be abroad, Lord Prior, when thou oughtest be saying thy nocturnal," said Bothwell.

"True; but belonging, as I do, to the Reformed kirk, I own no monastic law; no! by the most immaculate Jupiter!" bawled the lay prior as he swaggered along; "'Tis very-long since I abjured the follies of the Church of Rome."

"She lost much by thy defection," said Bothwell, scornfully; "but devil take me, Prior, if thou art not very drunk."

"By the body o' Bacchus, thou art no better than a horned owl to say so! But keep your rapiers ready, sirs; for yonder is a tall fellow who seems disposed to bar the way."

"Where? *ventre bleu!*" exclaimed d'Elbœuff, drawing his sword.

"Where?—where?" asked the others.

"Why, right on the crown of the causeway; and, fore Heaven! he *doth* seem a marvellously tall fellow."

"By cock and pie! 'tis the city cross, thou blind bat!"

"Right, Ormiston!" replied Bothwell; "but his reverence is so drunk that he knows not a cross from a cow. Past mid-

night? soh! a famous hour for such regular men as we to be strolling along the streets, like knights of the post; and thou, bully Hob, art without thine armour."

"I have a pyne doublet that would turn the bolt of an arblast—double quilted."

"The streets are dull, and I am very [sleepy," stammered Coldinghame.

"Speak not of sleep, my Lord Privy Seal," said the Earl; "for we have a notable brawl to make yet. We must show these raseally bailies that their night-watch and captains of the thirty wards had no referencee to us, who are lords and barons of Parliament."

"Thou hast ever some wieked thought in thy gomeral's eostard. A brawl! with whom pray?"

"With *thee*, Lord Prior, if thou talkest thus!" rejoined Bothwell, adjusting his mantle, angrily.

"*Vrai Dieu!* chevaliers," said the Frenchman; "after so happy a night, don't quarrel, I pray you."

"I would give a seore of bright bonnet-pieees to meet a few of Moray's or Morton's swashbucklers coming down the street just now! I am in the right mood for a fray," said Blaeck Hob. "Suppose we ring the Tron bell, and shout fire, saek, and the English!"

"Or break into the house of some raseally bourgeoisie, and carry off his pretty wife," said the Marquis d'Elbœuff. "Oh, *ventre bleu!* de Brissae, de Vendome, and I, have played that prank many a night among the Hugonots in the Rue de Marmousets, and the dear rogues in the Rue de Glatigny—"

"At Paris, thou meanest," said Bothwell; "but our wooden-headed burghers set a value upon their conjugal ware different from your countrymen. The price French, is by franes and livres; the price Scottish, blows and steel blades. One might as well venture into a wasps' nest."

"*Nom d'un Pape!* Bothwell is growing tame," retorted the Marquis. "I knew that being once regularly wedded would spoil him."

"*Once!*" laughed Ormiston. "I warrant him—"

"Peace, gomeral!" thundered the Earl, plaicing his gauntleted hand on Hob's mouth. "What wert thou about to say, i' the devil's name?"

"Only that I would wish to show some of these fanatical

Protestants that, being doubly damned, they have no right to keep their wives and daughters, or handmaidens, all to themselves."

"*Tête Dieu!*" cried d'Elbœuff, brandishing his rapier; "ah, the selfish Hugonots!—we must teach them the new law. Who will follow me? for Bothwell seemeth white-livered."

"Dost thou gibe me, Marquis? God wot! I should like to see thee ettle at aught that I will not surpass."

"Then here is a house. Draw, chevaliers! — *vive la joie!* let us beat up the door, knock down the bourgeoisie, and carry off the first pretty woman to my hotel in the Cowgate!"

Lord Coldinghame grasped his cloak, saying—

"Beelzebub! Marquis, art thou mad? 'Tis the house of Master John Knox."

"A million of thunders!" grumbled the Frenchman, falling back abashed on hearing that formidable name; "we should have the whole city about our ears. But come—*allons!* I will show ye a place better suited for such merry rogues as we than the house of that arch-heretic. There is Madame Alisong Cragg—a notable lady of joy!"

"Bravo, Marquis!—thou art right!" exclaimed Bothwell. "My rascal, French Paris, tells me there is a famous foreign beauty concealed there—brought, 'tis said, by Morton or Arran. And dost thou know that the Ambassador of Duke Philibert of Savoy—what is his name?"

"The Count di Mezezzo."

"Ah! the same—saw her yesterday as he rode past, and hath raved about her ever since?"

"Monsieur l'Ambassadeur has the eyes of Argus for a pretty woman; so *allons, messieurs!*" said the gay Frenchman, and they all staggered arm-in-arm down the wynd.

"Hark! listen!" said Bothwell.

They halted under the windows of Dame Craig's dwelling; some of these were partly open, and emitted into the misty street the odour of a close room and a luxurious supper—the fumes of wine and a night debauch. Through the thick gratings that defended them, flakes of light streamed into the dark and gloomy wynd, while a clear and manly voice was heard to sing one of those blasphemous ballads which were so obnoxious to Queen Mary—

"Ane cursed *fox* hath lain in the rocks,
Hidden this many a day,
Devouring sheep ; but a *hunter* shall scare
This cursed fox away.

"The hunter is Christ, that spurs in haste,
His hounds are St. Peter and Paul ;
The *Pope* is the fox, and *Rome* is the rocks,
That rub us to the gall.

"Poor Pope ! had to sell the Tantony bell,
And pardons for ilka thing ;
Remissions of sins in old sheepskins,
Our souls from hell to bring.

"With bulls of lead, white wax and red,
And other whiles of green ;
This cursed fox, enclosed in a box,
Such devilry never was seen."

On hearing this doggerel ballad,* Bothwell and his friends drew their swords in deliberate anger, intent less on a brawl than on punishing the singer ; for this ditty was one of those which, by the efforts of the more zealous clergy, had been set to the ancient music of the Catholic Church, and were usually sung by the lowest rabble, "to ferment that wild spirit of fanaticism, which in the following age involved the nation in blood, and overturned the state of three kingdoms."

Neither Bothwell nor d'Elbœuff were very rigid Catholics, yet they burned to punish this irreligious ribaldry, coming as it did from a place which, in their younger days, had been appropriated to purposes so very different. Black Ormiston and John of Coldinghame cared not a bodle about the matter ; but, nevertheless, they muffled their mantles about their left arms, adjusted their masks, and assailed the house with drawn swords.

CHAPTER XXXVII*.

THE GLEEWOMEN.

FURIOUSLY they knocked, and immediately the lights were extinguished, the singing ceased, and the windows were closed. Again and again they thundered on the planking of the nail-studded door, till the solid walls of the house were shaken, but there was no attention paid.

* For which see Andro Hart's "Godly Ballate Buik."—NOTE by the Magister Absalom.

"Ho, within there!" cried Bothwell. "Alison, devil take thee! art thou deaf or drunk?"

"*Ventre St. Gris!*" grumbled the Marquis, skipping aside, as a stoup of water was poured from the upper story upon his laced mantle. "I will spit them all like larks! *Tonnere!* but I will!"

"Hallo! 'ware your costards, sirs!" exclaimed Ormiston, as a large billet of wood came down next. "Cock and pie! the garrison show mettle."

"Who are without there?" asked a man, through one of those reconnoitering holes with which all the doors in the city were then provided; but they could perceive the voice to be a feigned one. "What ribald cullions are ye?"

"The godly Earl of Arran, and his friend, Master John Knox!" replied Bothwell, in a snuffing voice, amid a shout of laughter.

"Lewd varlet, thou liest! for the Lord Arran is here a-bed."

"Oho! then, tell him there are four tall fellows here, each of whom is better than he; so bid him take sword and cloak and come forth, lest we burn the house and Dame Alison to boot, for we have vowed a vow to make entrance."

"Help! help! Axes and staves! Armour! armeur! Fie!" screamed the shrill voices of Alison Craig and several of her gleewomen and companions from the upper windows. "Thieves! stouthrief! and hamesucken! Help! help!"

"*Sacré bleu!* what a devil of a noise thou makest, Madame Alisong!" cried d'Elboeuff. "*Ma belle coquette—ma chère madame.*"

While Bothwell and Coldinghame were endeavouring to burst open the door (using as much energy as if the whole salvation of men depended upon their success), it was suddenly opened; a strong glare of light flashed into the gloomy wynd, and a tall cavalier, masked and muffled in a mantle of scarlet velvet, and wearing a very broad beaver flapped down over his eyes, appeared in the passage, armed with a long glittering sword and bowl-hilted dagger for parrying. He burst out, and commenced hewing right and left; but, finding his escape barred in every direction, he fell on desperately, bending all his energies to slay Bothwell, who encountered him hand to hand.

Daringly they fought for some twenty passes, the fire flashing from their swords, when the stranger suddenly broke away

and escaped, leaving behind his rich mantle, of which the Earl immediately possessed himself.

"Scarlet taffeta—lined with white satin—laced with gold, too! Now, whose ware may this be?"

"The King's!" said Ormiston and others.

"Darnley's—now, by Heaven!"

"Send it to her Majesty," said Hob, "with Madame Craig's leal service."

"Nay, by St. Bothan! I will wear it under King Henry's nose at Court to-morrow," replied the madcap noble, as they all burst into the house with their drawn swords, and made a tremendous uproar by rushing from room to room, up the narrow wooden stairs, and through the pannelled corridors, pursuing the shrieking glee-girls with oaths and boisterous laughter. In one apartment they found the remains of the feast, and several flasks of good wine, which they immediately confiscated for their own use, and then made more noise than ever.

Alison Craig was dragged from her hiding-place in an oak almshouse by the reformed Prior of Coldingham, who placed his rapier at her throat, and threatened instant death if she did not produce the fair Ribaude, whom the Lord Morton had committed to her charge.

"Aroint thee, dame!" said Bothwell. "We will have thee ducked on the cuckstule as a scold, and pilloried for dancing round the summer-pole, which thou knowest to be alike contrary to the Bible and John Knox."

Pouring forth alternate threats of vengeance and entreaties to desist, Alison, whose well-rouged cheeks and painted brow were by turns blanched with terror and crimsoned with rage, led them reluctantly towards an apartment which, in former days, had been a little private oratory for the Lady Superior, or Reverend Mother. The pointed door was of oak, carved with the emblems of religion—the crown of thorns, and the hands and feet pierced by nails; the sacred heart and the cross were still there, but they ornamented what the change of manners had made the abode of a glee-woman.

Bothwell, whose whole spirit was now bent on mischief and frolic, with one kick of his heavy buff boot split the old door in two, and, as the falling fragments unfolded, to his consternation he beheld—Anna Rosenkrantz!

Pale, terrified, and motionless as a statue, she was standing

about six paces from him, and near a little table, on which lay her crucifix and missal, in evidence that she had been praying devoutly. Her cheeks were blanched, her eyes were dilated, and her lip curled slightly with anger at the insults she anticipated; but with a serene brow, and aspect of modesty and dignity, she drew herself up to her full height, and with her stately train sweeping behind, and her high ruff bristling with starch and pride, confronted these violent intruders, the two principals of whom she failed to recognise under the black velvet masks—an article of wearing apparel which the residence of so many French, Spanish, and Italian ambassadors had now made common among the Scottish noblesse.

“Death and confusion!” muttered the Earl, falling back a pace.

“Cock and pie!” said Ormiston, under his bushy moustaches; “we have started the wrong game.”

“Aha, my *belle coquette*!” said d’Elbœuff, advancing with his blandest smile, and kissing his hands as he bowed to the rosettes at his knees; “*ma jolie damoiselle—comment vous en va?*”

“Hold, Marquis! we are in error,” said the Earl, in a deep and fierce whisper, as he grasped the arm of the French noble, and drew him back.

Though Anna did not hear the words, there was something in their accent and in the air of Bothwell that struck a chord in her memory; her colour heightened, and her eyes lit up. He saw in a moment that he would be recognised; and, pushing his friends before him by main strength down the narrow stair, he drove them into the street—an unexpected proceeding—which filled them with so much rage, that their swords would infallibly have been turned against him had other work not been prepared for them.

Now the blaze of torches filled the narrow wynd, glinting on its fantastic architecture, its grated windows, and carved outshots, on the steel caps, green doublets, and arrow-heads of a band of Mary’s Archer Guard, which hurried to the scene of the uproar, led by their captain on horseback, in a handsome suit of light armour, to assist the two civic commanders of that district—a baxter and a dagger-maker—who, with twenty citizens in steel bonnets and jacks, and armed with partisan and whinger, had also sallied forth to maintain the peace of the burgh.

Dreading that, if taken, he would be unmasked, discovered, and brought before Mary, and, by being involved in an adventure so dishonourable, lose perhaps her favour for ever, Bothwell fought desperately up the street, and wounded several of the archers, shouting all the while, "A Hamilton! a Hamilton!" to mislead the assailants as to his identity, and make them suppose him to be the young Earl of Arran, who was known to be slightly deranged by his love for the queen.

On hearing the war-cry of his house, the clang of the swords and axes, and all the uproar excited by such a brawl, (where the parties engaged were well protected by defensive armour), Gavin Hamilton, abbot of Kilwinning, a younger son of the Duke of Chatelherault, with a few of his retinue, sallied forth in armour to aid the Earl and his three friends, who had gradually changed the scene of their conflict to the broad central street of the city, up which they were pressing with great vigour.

The arrival of the gallant abbot caused a continuance of the brawl with renewed energy and fury, and the dense masses pressing to the centre, shouted on one side, "A Hamilton!" on the other, "A Darnley! a Darnley!" and swayed to and fro from the turreted platform of the city cross to the Tron Beam, where the merchandise was weighed; while the clangour of bells, and the clamour of the arming citizens, uniting with the fury of the fray, drowned the cries of the wounded, and the twanging of the bows, as the royal archers shot at random into the mist and gloom.

The deacons of the crafts were crying "Armour! armour! Axes and staves!" Craigmillar, the provost, was buckling on his harness in his strong dwelling at Peebles Wynd, and the council were mustering in their usual place of meeting, the Holy Blood Aisle in St. Giles' Church; but the arrival of the Earls of Huntly and Moray with a fresh band of archers, compelled the Abbot of Kilwinning to make a hasty retreat. Black Hob escaped with him, and reached in safety his own dwelling in the Netherbow, above Bassyndine the printer's establishment; but Bothwell and his two remaining friends were made prisoners, disarmed, deprived of their masks, and rather unceremoniously conducted to Holyrood.

"I thought, good-brother of mine, thou hadst got rid of thy follies, and become a very Carthusian," said the young Earl of

Huntly, with some little scorn, to Bothwell, as he returned him his magnificent rapier.

"Ah—indeed!" said the other with a polite smile.

"My sister—Jane—thy countess," continued Huntly gravely; "from being quiet, silent, and dejected, since thou leftest Bothwell castle, hath become delirious—yea, frantic; and canst thou tell me aught of this Anna, of whom she raves incessantly?"

"By the holy Paul!" replied Bothwell, with admirable coolness, "I know no more than thou. 'Tis some phantom of her brain, and this horrible calamity has so oppressed me, that—"

"Thou plungedst into every mad extravagance and folly. Thou spendest thy days among dicemen and drinkers, thy nights among wantons and gleewomen, with such blockheads as Ormiston and d'Elbœuff, to bury all memory of my sister—ha! is it?"

"Exactly; 'tis the wisest mode and the merriest, by the mass! So a fair good-morning, my Lord—well-a-day, fair, noble Moray!" said the Earl, bowing to the nobles of his escort as he raised his plumed bonnet, and entered the little doorway of the Duke of Albany's tower. A dark frown knit the broad brow of the young Highland noble, as he watched the Earl's retreating figure, and he muttered in Gaelic between his teeth—

"Had not my sister vowed before the altar of God to love, obey, and cherish thee, by all that is sacred on earth and blessed in heaven, false Lord of Bothwell, this dagger had rung on thy breast-bone!"

D'Elbœuff and the Prior of Coldinghame were also conducted to separate chambers, where, just as daylight began to glint on the city vanes, and to lighten the gloomy courts and cloisters of the ancient palace, they were securely locked up, and left to their own confused reflections, and the occupation of nursing their bruises.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A MOMENT LONG WISHED FOR.

THE red October sun was gleaming on the casements of Holyrood, and filling the north and western sides of its courts (the palace then had five) with light and warmth, while the southern remained in shadow. The royal standard waved on the tower of James V., then the northern and most lofty part of

this palace, which was burned by the fanatics of Cromwell, and was much more irregular in architectural design, and very different in aspect from the present stately edifice, which the skill of Sir William Bruce engrafted on the old remains.

The queen's archers were bustling about the gothic porch and outer gates, with their bows strung and belts bristling with arrows; the tramp of hoofs, the clatter of harness, the voices of pages, grooms and yeomen, rang in the royal stables, and all the usual stir and business of the day were commencing, though somewhat earlier—for on that morning the Privy Council were to meet, and already the Lord Chancellor, Morton, Stewart the High Treasurer, the Secretary of the Kingdom, Macgill of Rankeillor, the Lord Clerk Register, and many other nobles and officers of state, were arriving, attended by their usual retinues of armed horsemen, and quarrelsome swashbucklers on foot, clad in half armour, with swords, targets, and pistolettes, and having the badges of their feudal lords fixed to their basinets.

Elbowing his way through the mass of pages, valets, and men-at-arms, that filled the outer court, and whistling merrily as he went, the handsome young lieutenant of the royal archers, Sir John Hepburn of Bolton, was seen clad in his gayest attire—a green velvet doublet trimmed with scarlet, and laced with gold, a purple mantle, and blue bonnet garnished with a white feather. He ascended the narrow and winding staircase of the Alban tower, where Konrad was confined, and into which he was admitted by an archer of his own band, who was posted as sentinel in the corridor.

By Bothwell's directions, Konrad had been treated like a knight or gentleman rather than an outlawed moss-trooper, or broken border-man, under which name he was charged with an attempt to slay the Queen's lieutenant.

Calm and collected, but sad and thoughtful, he was leaning against the grated window, and watching the October sunrise, the warm light of which was rendering yet more red the faded foliage of the copsewood that lay to the eastward of the palace, and the old red walls of the Abbey church, where at that moment the Queen was kneeling on St. David's grave, and praying at the same altar before which her sires had prayed four hundred years before.

Konrad's garments were now rather nondescript, and considerably worn; his beard and moustaches had been long un-

trimmed ; his eyes were hollow, and his cheeks were becoming ghastly and wan.

"What manner of man art thou?" asked Bolton, who now saw Konrad for the first time, and remarked, with surprise, the contrast of his address and attire. "Thou lookest somewhat like a follower of the lord of little Egypt—perchance thou art the great Johnnie Faa himself? Mass! man, but thou art an odd specimen of the tatterdemalion!"

"Sir," replied Konrad, mildly, "I am a foreigner, and must be excused if I cannot discern the politeness of your queries."

"Foreigner—eh!" rejoined the young laird of Bolton, who, though far from being ill-natured, had a blunt manner; "a fiddler, I warrant! as if we had not enow and to spare, before David Rizzio was dirked in the next room. Mass! we have Jehan d'Amiot, the French conjuror, who foretold Davy's death; we have Sebastian, the violer; Francisco Rizzio; French Paris; and the devil knoweth how many more about us. Dost thou play the guitar, or the viol-de-gambo?"

"I play neither," replied Konrad, haughtily.

"Then in what dost thou excel? for all these foreign knaves excel us poor Scottish barbarians in some slight of hand."

"I can handle the bow, the arblast, the backsword and dagger, the morglay and ghisarma, with all of which, Sir Archer, I am very much at your service."

"Now, God be with thee!" replied Bolton, frankly clapping him on the shoulder; "thou art a right cock o' the game. I love thy mood; and, if I can see thee well through this ugly business—by St. Bothan of Hepburn I will! But thou hast a powerful foe in the Earl of Bothwell, with whom thou art about to be confronted, though he (madcap that he is!) has fallen into a small escapado with a certain gay damsel of the city, whom I have sent twelve of my archers to bring before the council, by Lord Morton's order; but come with me, sir, for the Queen requires your presence."

"The Queen!" reiterated Konrad, but thinking only of Anna. "Oh, the long-wished moment must be come at last! 'Tis well—I hasten to implore her clemency, and to trust to her justice."

The apartment in which the council met was in that part of the monastery of Holyrood which had been decorated by the late king, James V.; it was wainscoted, and had been painted with various devices by Sir Thomas Galbraith, the royal limner;

but part was hung with that ancient tapestry which is still preserved in the newer palace, and represents the battles of Constantine. The ceiling was blue, studded with *fleur-de-lys*, in compliment to the late Queen mother, Mary of Lorraine; but the floor had been fashioned by the early monks of the Holy Rood, in the old Scottish manner, before the invention of saw-mills, and when trees were simply split by wedges, and the boards roughly dressed by the adze or axe, and then secured with nails having heads of polished iron as broad as penny pieces.

This primitive style is still to be seen at Castle Grant, in Strathspey.

The deep-mouthed fireplace was a gothic arch, rich with cabbage-leaves and sculptured roses; it contained one of those massive old grates, surmounted by an enormous thistle, which we may still see in James V's tower; and above it hung a portrait of the late Cardinal Beaton, with his grave dark eyes and red baretta.

The table was covered with green cloth; the *Regiam Majestatem*, *Quoniam Attachiamenta*, and other ancient tomes; the silver mace and seal of Council lay upon it, together with a mass of parchments and papers, before which sat he of the keen eye and thoughtful brow, Secretary Lethington, with two servitors or clerks beside him. Morton, with his high ruff and long beard; Moray, with his smart moustache and close shorn hair; Glencairn, stern of eye, ferocious in aspect, and sheathed in steel; Lindesay, his aged compeer, armed in the fashion of a bygone age, having the globular corselet, the angled tuilles, and long sollerets of James III., with other peers—took their places at the board, but remained standing and uncovered; for the door by which the Queen was to approach the throne was now thrown open, and the scarlet liveries and gilt partisans of the yeomen of the guard were visible below the festooned arras of the entrance.

A party of the archer guard occupied the lower end of this long chamber, which was lighted by a range of well-barred windows that faced the lofty crags of Salisbury. In one of these lounged Hepburn of Bolton, leaning on his long sword, and with his soldierlike frankness conversing freely with Konrad, notwithstanding that the latter was there that day to answer for southrief and border felony—two charges which poor Konrad (the victim of circumstances) would find it very difficult to

answer. But now a thrill shot through his heart; for, amid much bustle and some noise, the Earl of Bothwell, the Marquis d'Elbœuff, and John of Coldinghame, were ushered in, and, bowing to the lords, retired a little; for they were there rather as culprits than privy councillors, and looked about them with haughty and supercilious smiles.

"Dost thou know, Marquis," whispered the irritated Earl, loudly enough to be heard by all; "that to me there seemeth something intensely despicable in such a baron as I, who can muster five thousand horse, being arraigned before a *woman*, like a rascally page or a chamber wench?"

"*Certainement*—and I before my little niece! *Milles tonnerres!*" replied the Marquis, pulling up his ruff, which was all bristling with whalebone.

"I feel at this moment a profound veneration for thy musty old Salique law, which——"

"*Peste!* here comes her majesty the Queen!" interrupted the Frenchman, bowing till the point of the long toledo tilted up his mantle at an angle of forty-five degrees.

Dressed in plain black velvet, slashed at the bosom and shoulders with white satin, having her long train borne by the ladies Mary Fleming and Mary Beatoun, with a long lace veil floating from her stately head, a little close ruff under her chin, and the order of the Thistle sparkling on her neck, Mary entered, and with a graceful inclination of her head and a bright smile to all—looking more like the Queen of some fair clime of love and song than of fierce and fanatical Scotland—swept up to the throne and took her seat under its purple canopy, while her ladies and their pages retired a little behind it.

Then only in her twenty-fourth year, Mary seemed fresh and blooming as the *Venus Celestis* of the ancients; for she had just come from her morning bathing, in the little turreted bath that still remains at the western corner of the royal garden; and where tradition asserts that she bathed in white wine; but a pure and limpid spring yet wells up beneath the floor, to contradict the legend.

She was accompanied by Darnley, whose magnificent doublet of cloth of gold was gleaming with jewels and seed pearls; but his face was pale, and his eyes were languid, bloodshot, and restless: his scarf was torn; his plumes were broken; something very like a female coif was hanging from a slash in his

trunk breeches; and it was evident that he had been rambling with other debauchees the livelong night. Several gentlemen of the Lennox accompanied him, and as they entered somewhat unceremoniously, brushed past Bothwell and d'Elbœuff; but the former grasped one by the mantle, saying—

“Mahoud! fellow, dost thou take us for Lennox lairds? Baek, sir! we hold our fiefs by knights' service, *not* by pimp tenure.”

Between the hostile and intriguing spirits who crowded that gloomy chamber, many a deep, dark scowl was furtively exchanged.

Darnley, who was perfumed to excess, and carried a pouncet-box, bestowed all his attention, as usual, on Mariette Hubert, a maid of honour, and darkly and fixedly the lieutenant of the archers watched his insidious attentions. Darnley bent malignant eyes on Bothwell, who, in bravado, wore the well-known scarlet mantle; and Bothwell and Konrad were scowling at each other in turns; for the former felt no small dread of a *dénouement*, by which he might lose for ever that which was only dawning upon him, and under the sunshine of which he had begun to cherish, in secret, such daring and alluring hopes—the favour of the Queen.

“Well-a-day, fair, my Lords of Bothwell and d'Elbœuff,” said the petulant young King; “you made a notable brawl in our good burgh last night. Beat off the watch, and wounded six of the royal archers, and yet to be made captives! Ha! ha! came it of lack of skill or lack of will?”

“Of neither!” replied the Earl, with a smiling lip, “as I believe your Majesty very well knoweth. Ha! ha! I picked up this mantle in the fray. I hope you know the owner, and admire its fashion?”

“Is it dagger-proof?” asked the King, with affected ease.

“No; but my doublet is,” replied the Earl, with the same quiet air, and a volume of courtly hatred and duplicity was exchanged with these significant remarks; but Darnley resumed his cold smile, and once more turned to the pretty Mariette, the sister of French Paris.

Konrad, whose handsome figure and pale features, with untrimmed beard and short, curly hair, Mary had been regarding from time to time with true feminine interest, was now led forward by Maitland of Lethington, who charged him with “treason,

in rising in effeir of war against the royal authority, fire-raising, stouthrief, and felony in Liddesdale, under the umquhile John of Park, and for assailing openly in arms, with that deceased traitor, the Lord Warden of the Three Marehes, her Graee's lieutenant, James Earl of Bothwell, within the bounds of his own barony of Hermitage, wherc he was wounded deadly in peril of his life by the blow of a jeddard staff."

"*Ma foi !*" said Mary to her sister Argyle, "is he not a fair young man, and a winsome, to die the death of an outlaw? Approaeh, sir, and reply to this terrible charge."

"Madame," said Konrad kneeling on one knee, and again drawing himself up to his full height, with an air that was not lost on the bright eyes that regarded him with melancholy interest, "may it please your Majesty to hear my story?—it is a short but a sad one."

"Say forth!" replied the Queen, and Bothwell felt himself growing pale; for he almost deplored his clemeney, that had spared Konrad in Liddesdale.

"Sweet madam ! I am a stranger here in the land of the Seots ; I know not their laws nor their fashions ; I barely know enough of their language to make myself understood ; and if, in the tale I am about to tell, I seem to become confused, or to forget myself, I pray your gentleness to remember the great presenee in which I stand, and excuse me. A strange eombination of untoward circumstanees have brought me into the position in which I this day find myself before you ; but think not, gracious madam, that I mean to draw upon your gentle pity, for life hath long lost every eharm to me ; and, if it were spared, I have but one thought now, and that is, after having aecomplished the mission on which I sought these shores, to return to my native Norway, and die a monk in the eloisters of St. Olaf at Upslo."

Konrad paused ; his eyes moistened, and he sighed deeply. The Queen and her ladies beecame intensely interested by this sad exordium ; but the Lords Lindesay and Glencairn, who were anxious to have Bothwell's affair brought under notice, could not repress signs of disgust and disdain at all this preamble and delay about hanging a pitiful border outlaw.

"Madam ! I am the last of the old House of Saltzberg, in the province of Aggerhuis. I was born where—"

"Thou art not likely to die !" interrupted Gleneairn, striking the table with his gauntleted hand. "God's murrain ! no !

Under favour of the Queen's grace, I would submit to your lordships if we are to sit here listening to the tale of a cunning romaunt teller, when there are more important matters anent quhilk we are this day convened in council. Besides, I would remind your grace and lordships that this caitiff, in defiance of our laws anent the abomination of the mass and the vile idols of paganrie, hath avowit to our beards his intention of becoming ane masse-priest, quhilk is a faet so bold, so sinful, and so malapert, that I marvel sorely at your patienec in hearing it silently; and further, as I think the affirmit word of the Lord Bothwell and the Laird of Ormiston, that the panel was taken in armour, in ane attempt to slay that noble lord on the marches of his own barony of Hermitage, quhilk ineludeth foreible hamesueken as well as homicide and outlawrie, are all, I deem, more than enow to deserve sentenec of death. Let him be beheaded and quartered!"

Mary was about to speak, when the Lord Lindesay bluntly interrupted her.

"The Lord Earl of Gleneairn hath (as he always doth) spoken well; and I move that, ineontinent, this knave be removit forth from this chamber, and straight conveyit to the place of doom, as ane daredevil moss-trooper, ane false and idolatrous mass-monger, and as a sign of judgment to his compeers in all time coming. What sayest thou, my Lord of Morton?"

"With thee. Better hang now than die a mass-priest, and be damned ineontinently!"

With a crimsoned cheek and a heaving breast, Mary turned from peer to peer on hearing those suecessive insults levelled at her religion; but she read the most stolid and iron bigotry in every face, save her brother's, who contrived to veil every emotion under a bland serenity of visage that no eye could fathom.

"My lords, hold!" she exclaimed. "Am I the daughter of James V.?—am I your sovereign or your slave? Will you dare to condemn or forgive in my presenec, without consulting me? I say this man *shall not die!* even though he had bent a spear against my own breast, as well as that of my lieutenant, who, I know, can be as generous and forgiving as he is brave and noble. And well may he be forgiving if I, the administrator of the laws (St. Mary help me!), can afford to be so."

"Your Majesty is right," said the Earl of Bothwell, who was anxious for Konrad's removal on any terms. "I crave that he

may be re-delivered to me, to be treated as he deserves; and I hope your Majesty knows me well enough to believe that his usage will be generous."

"Then be it so. Sir John Hepburn, deliver this prisoner to your lord the Earl, who must bring him to me again, for I am dying with curiosity to learn his story."

"Away with him, Bolton!" said the Earl, in a hasty whisper, "and see a' God's name thou keepest him close, permitting none to hold converse with him, till I have him despatched to sure ward, at Bothwell or Hermitage."

And thus the object of the long wished-for interview was frustrated, and Konrad was hurried away by the archers; but at the moment he retired, Bothwell turned about, and beheld what made him change colour so perceptibly, that Darnley and others, whose eyes were seldom turned from him, perceived it immediately.

The Earl of Morton, with an assumed air of the deepest respect, led in Anna Rosenkrantz, who had just been conducted to the palace by a party of Sir Arthur Erskine's archers.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ANNA AND THE QUEEN.

"UNDER favour of your Majesty and these noble lords," said the Earl of Morton, with a most studiedly stolid aspect, "I have the pleasure to present a lady of Norway, a subject of our war-like ally, Frederick of Denmark, who claims the great honour of being *first* Countess of Bothwell."

It is impossible to describe the astonishment these words and the appearance of Anna occasioned in all present. Every eye was bent inquiringly upon her, and the charge against Bothwell, d'Elbœuff, and Coldinghame was forgotten in this new aspect of affairs.

Shame and rage, but from very different motives, filled the breasts of Bothwell and of Huntly. The former was pale, though his dark eyes were full of fire; but the brow of the latter was crimsoned by the generous wrath of a fierce brother, jealous of his sister's honour. They both started to their feet and grasped their swords, while their more immediate friends began to draw near them with darkening faces.

"*Sacre nom de !—Beelzebub !*"—muttered the perplexed d'Elbœuff, twirling his moustaches; while Darnley's face, and the faces of Bothwell's enemies, beamed with delight; and his mortal foe, the Earl of Moray, though almost trembling with exultation, betrayed it not by one glance or alteration of his grave and handsome face. The Queen seemed also disturbed; and, under the stern and indignant flash of her keen dark eyes, even Bothwell quailed, as calm, and cold, and statue-like she drew herself up to her full height, and gazed upon the sinking and trembling Anna, who, advancing to within one pace of the dais, sunk upon her knees, and, clasping her hands, raised her bright eyes to Mary's gentle face, and, as she did so, all her glittering tresses rolled in a volume over her neck and shoulders. Remembering the undisguised admiration which the Earl had ever professed for herself, Mary felt something of a woman's pique at this new and beautiful claimant on his heart, and, for a moment, she almost gazed coldly upon her.

"Yea, Madam," repeated Morton, striking his cane on the floor, "a lady who accuseth James, Earl of Bothwell, of wedding, and ignobly deserting her."

"'Tis false, Lord Earl!" exclaimed Bothwell, choking with passion, and endeavouring to pull off his glove. "By the joys of heaven, and the pains of hell—'tis false! I swear, 'tis false!"

"False!" reiterated Anna, in a piercing voice. "Oh, Bothwell, Bothwell, darest thou to say so—thou who didst lure me from my home, my happy home! and a heart that loved me well? Oh, do me justice, madam, ere I die! I am indeed his wife—his wife whom he swore, before the blessed sign of our redemption, to love, to cherish, and to protect!"

"I vow, madam, she raves!" said the Earl, quietly, collecting all his thoughts in secret desperation; for he found himself standing on the edge of a precipice.

"Oh, madam! hear my mournful story; and condemn me not unheard."

"Do not listen to a word of it, madam," said the Earl; "I beg you will not. 'Tis all some rascally plot of my enemies to ruin me for ever in the favour of your majesty, and my very good lord and kinsman, the Earl of Huntly."

A smile, both dubious and scornful, lit the face of the Highland Earl, who played ominously with his long dagger, while Bothwell reflected bitterly on—

“What a tangled web we weave,
When first we practise to *deceive*.”

“I conjure your majesty not to hear her!” he urged; “and yet, why should I fear? The honour of the house of Hepburn has been sustained untarnished since old Adam of Hailes and Traprairie first unfurled his pennon by the side of Bruce! and assuredly it cannot suffer now by the artful story of a despicable gleewoman—Ha! ha!—a minion of the gallant Lord of Morton.”

“Let her speak for herself,” said Mary; “I will not be cheated of this story. Rise, woman! and fearlessly and truly afford us proof of the grave charge thou preferrest against this great and potent lord.”

Thus encouraged, Anna, in moving accents, which her broken language made yet more touching and simple, related her early love for Konrad, and Konrad’s single-hearted devotion; and how the artful Earl had weaned all her affections to himself; how he had so solemnly espoused her before the altar of the Hermit of Bergen; had borne her far away from her home to that strong castle in the solitary isle of Westeray, and had there abandoned her for the arms of another.

“Jesu Maria!” said the Queen, with sadness and astonishment; “thy story is like a chapter of the Hundred Tales. ’Tis a melancholy one, in sooth! But, *ma bonne*, what proof canst thou afford us of all this?”

“My word, madam!” sobbed Anna; “my word only!—I am the daughter of a belted knight, who died in battle.”

“But this great lord will also give us his word that thou art false, and can back his assertion by five thousand lances. Now, in this bad world, where everybody is so false, who am I to believe?”

The Earl, who, during Anna’s pathetic address (every word of which stung him to the soul), had been intently polishing his waist-buckle with his leathern glove, now replied boldly—

“I trust that your majesty will believe *me*—whose word no man now living hath ever dared to doubt—and believe me, when I declare the whole of this fabrication to be the invention of some unknown enemy, to deprive me of the little favour with which you have honoured me, as a return for my dutiful devoir and loyal service in our raid into Liddesdale. And I think, when *the place* wherein this wretched woman was found,

is taken into consideration, that I need not trouble myself much in denying the whole accusation."

"*Mon Dieu!* my lord, thou sayest true!" replied Mary, struck with the remark. "I own that it throws suspicion on the whole; and I have lived long enow among you to see the lengths courtiers will resort to, for undermining each other."

"And this woman," continued the Earl, whose indignation increased with his success; "this accursed harridan—this Alison Craig—why comes she not to back the charge of her gleewoman? I well know that the Lord Arran will vouch for *her* truth and honesty—yea, and greater men than he!"

Arran grasped his Parmese dagger; but Darnley, to whom all this had given intense delight, stayed his hand, and they exchanged glances expressive of the sentiments that animated them; for both were vindictive and malignant, and both had great command of feature and of temper.

Poor Anna knew not until now the truth of what she had long ago suspected—the vile nature of the dwelling to which Morton had so infamously consigned her. Now it all burst on her like a flash of lightning, and she alternately became crimson with shame and anger, or pale as death with a mortal sickness of heart; for she saw in the sudden change of Mary's demeanour, and the half quizzical, half pitying eyes of the nobles, and the disdain of the maids of honour, how lightly her story was valued.

A perfect paralysis seemed to possess her; near the steps of the throne she sank upon her knees, with her hands clasped, her hair falling in clusters over her face, and her heart full of agony, as she thought of her father's pride, her mother's worth—of Konrad's slighted love, and old Sir Erick's kindness.

Bothwell, anxious for her immediate removal, animated alike by pity and anger, now approached the throne, and said—

"May it please your majesty, as Lord High Admiral, I was last night made acquainted by the Water Bailie of Leith, that there is now at anchor within a bowshot of the Mussel-cape, a certain ship of Denmark, the Biornen, commanded by Christian Alborg, who will sail with this evening's tide; and I move that this poor frantic damsel, who declares herself to be a subject of his Danish majesty, be sent on board, and transmitted to her home; and, if a hundred merks of silver will smooth the way to her, my purse shall not be lacking."

"Well, so be it! The presence of this vessel is indeed opportune," replied the too facile Queen. "*De tout mon cœur!* let her be removed, and this weary council be adjourned for to-day, that we may ramble into the garden, and see the bright sunshine and the autumnal flowers."

Obedient to a glance from his friend and chief, Sir John Hepburn, with a few archers, approached to raise Anna, but she started to her full height, shook back her heavy locks, and full, with flashing eyes and nostrils curled with scorn, she gazed upon Bothwell.

Pale and rigid as a statue, all save the curving lip and dilating eye, with an aspect serenely savage, she gazed upon her betrayer. Oh! at that moment, wildly as she loved him, Anna could have stabbed him to the heart.

"Farewell, Bothwell," she said, with an icy smile; "in that dark time which is coming, when sorrow and remorse shall harrow up thy coward soul, thou wilt recall the passage of this hour—the wrongs I have endured—the shame and the contumely I have suffered. Hah! and in that dark time of ruin and regret, (and she shook her clenched hand like an enraged Pythoness,) remember Anna!"

And, as Bolton led her hurriedly away, the memory of that keen bright glance from her wild dark eyes haunted Bothwell, when *the hour* she foretold came upon him.

"Jesu!" said Mary, crossing herself; "what an eye! what a glance! she must be an ill woman and a vile, to look thus. Argyle! *ma belle Sœur!*—let us to the garden!" She here turned round, as usual, expecting Darnley's proffered hand to lead her forth. He was again whispering to Mariette Hubert, from whose blushing cheeks and downcast eyes there was no mistaking the purport of his addresses. Mary thought how different were the days "when love was young, and Darnley kind!" A shade crossed her snowy brow, a haughty smile curled her beautiful lip, and she said, somewhat peremptorily—

"Lord Bothwell—your hand!"

The Earl instantly drew off his perfumed gloves, and led the Queen from the chair of state. The whole of the nobles rose, the archers of the guard drew back the heavy arras, the yeomen unfolded a strong glass door that opened towards the palace garden and ancient cloisters of the Abbey church—and from thence the Earl led Mary to her favourite seat, near the

venerable and elaborate dial-stone, while Darnley, her ladies, and several courtiers, followed in groups.

CHAPTER XL.

THE BOUQUET.

It was now, as we have said, October.

The falling leaves were brown and crisped ; the air was cool and balmy ; but in lieu of the whistling of birds that marks the merry summer, there was heard at times the harsh screaming of aquatic fowls, as they passed landward. The royal garden, which lies to the northward of the palace, was then (as now) overlooked on the south by the embattled tower of James V., the carved buttresses and aisle windows of the chapel royal ; and on the east by the old turreted chateau of Mary of Lorraine. The walks were then sheltered by thick and lofty hedges of privet, thorn, and holly, according to the ancient fashion of landscape gardening ; but the latter alone retained their dark-green hue, and were studded by scarlet berries. There were balustraded terraces, a wilderness of walks and hedges, treillages, and little canals ; but the chief ornaments were the mossy old fruit-trees, which had been planted and reared by the industrious monks of Abbot Ballantyne's days.

The sun shone joyously in the wide blue sky, and the old towers of the palace, and the square campanile of the church of SANCTÆ CRUCIS gleamed in the warm light. The few flowers of the season, which the care and skill of the royal gardener reared under glasses in a sheltered place, expanded their little cups and scentless petals in the warmth ; and inspired with joy by the bright sunshine and the fragrant perfume that a slight shower had drawn from the greensward, and the box-edged parterres, Mary's heart expanded like that of a beautiful bird ; and forgetful of the cares of state, and the bearded conclave she had just left, she clapped her white hands, and with a girlish playfulness, (that would have horrified John Knox, and petrified the General Assembly into stone,) half hummed and half sang one of Ronsard's sonnets.

Then, seating herself by the beautifully carved horologue which bears her name, and is still situated in the centre of the

garden, fixed upon a pedestal that rises from three octagon steps, she continued her sonnet, while playing alternately with a bouquet presented to her by the keeper of the gardens, and with Fidèle, her little Italian greyhound — the gift of the Conte di Mezezzo, the Savoyard ambassador.

“Of all the poems of Pierre, le gentilhomme Vendomois,” began the Earl, as he leant against the pedestal, over which there drooped a venerable weeping ash, and commenced a conversation, because he saw that Darnley and the ladies of the court were promenading at a distance, and that none observed him save his friend the Knight of Bolton. “Yes, madam; of all Ronsard’s poems, none has pleased me so much as that addressed to your majesty, in which he portrays three nations—Scotland, France, and England—contending around your cradle for which should possess you.”

“And Monsieur Jupiter, to whom the three fair sisters referred their claims, was most favourable to my dear and beautiful France. Ah! Jupiter was very sensible which I should love most,” said the Queen; then after a pause, she added—“O what a glorious lover Pierre Ronsard must be!”

“Oh, yes! think how tender are these lines;” and the Earl sang with a good voice—

“Bon jour, mon cœur; bon jour, ma douce vie;
Bon jour, mon œil; bon jour, ma chère amie;
He! bon jour, ma toute belle,
Ma mignardise, bon jour,
Mes delices, mon cœur,
Mon doux printemps, ma douce fleur nouvelle.”

“*Mon Dieu!*” exclaimed Mary, with sudden animation; “I last heard those lines—”

“At the Palace de la Tournelles.”

“One night—”

“Under your window.”

“Then, Mother Mary! thou knowest the singer!”

“’Twas I!” said the Earl, with a low voice.

Mary coloured deeply.

“’Twas I!” he added; “on the night before *your* marriage with the Dauphin, and *my* departure to Italy.”

“Lord Earl, thou hast really a voice,” said Mary, unwilling to perceive the implication of his words.

“Love will achieve anything, when it desires to please.”

"Love!" laughed the joyous Queen, in her tone of raillery. "I do not think thou very well knowest what love ought to be."

"Ah! say not so. When once kindled in a true heart," said the Earl, laying his hand upon his breast, "it can only be extinguished by death."

"*Ma foi!* but when a heart is so flexible that a sudden flame expands within it to-day for one, and to-morrow for another," replied Mary, (thinking of her gay husband, whose white feather was visible at times above the holly hedges), "and can never love as—as one would wish to be loved. 'Tis oddly said, that few are wedded to those they first loved."

"True, madam," said the Earl, with a lower voice; "my own poor heart hath known that too bitterly."

"Indeed!" laughed the Queen, "since when?"

"Since I first beheld thee, adorable Mary! a young and smiling maiden of seventeen, standing by the side of the puny Dauphin at the Tournelles, as his affianced bride," replied the Earl, as half kneeling he lightly kissed her hand, while all the warm passion he had first cherished for her, in the days of his heedless youth, swelled up in his bosom.

"This is too much, presumptuous lord!" said the Queen, suddenly becoming grave, as she rose from her seat, and moved slowly away. "I did but begin in jest, and thou dost end in earnest."

"So it is ever with love, adorable madam!" replied the Earl, clasping his hands.

"Silence!" said the Queen trembling; "thy words are full of sin. One whisper of this to Darnley, and thou art a lost man;" and she glided away like a haughty Juno, with her long train and veil floating behind her. At this threat Bothwell's heart glowed alike with love and anger; but he remained irresolute, and confounded by her sudden transition from gaiety to gravity, and watched her approach the postern of James V.'s tower. As she was about to enter, two aged, lean, and shrivelled hands were extended from the narrow-grated loophole of a strong and vaulted chamber in the basement story, and these immediately arrested Mary's attention. Folding her arms meekly upon her bosom, she bowed her head, and on her pure and snowy brow the forbidden sign of the cross was traced, and the hands were immediately withdrawn within the grating.

There, in that damp vault, lay Sir James Tarbet, a poor old priest, who had been discovered saying mass at midnight in the ruined chapel of St. Anthony on the Craig ; and for this heinous crime had been consigned to a dungeon by those champions of toleration, who enforced the iron laws of the new *regime*.

Softened by the old man's blessing, and the sentiments it called up within her, Mary, as she entered the tower, bowed to the Earl in token of forgiveness, and dropped (but whether by chance or design, the usually acute Magister Absalom sayeth not) her bouquet, of which the enamoured lord immediately possessed himself, and placed in his bosom, bowing almost to the earth as she disappeared. His heart beat like lightning ; a new and triumphant glow expanded like a flame within it, and he seemed to tread on air.

"*Parbleu !*" said the Marquis d'Elbœuff, who had observed this scene, and came pirouetting along the walk, looking like a great grasshopper, with his long rapier and short mantle ; "ha ! ha ! art thou still for the Salique law ?"

"Blockhead !" muttered the Earl impatiently.

"Remember that clause of it which saith, 'He who squeezes the hand of a free woman shall pay a fine of fifteen golden sols.'"

"Ah ! but callest thou the Queen a free woman, when she is a slave to the ten thousand caprices of yonder great baboon, her husband ?" said the Earl, as, with a bitterness he could not conceal, he abruptly left the Marquis, and retired from the garden.

CHAPTER XLI.

JEALOUSY WITHOUT LOVE.

IN the Earl's bosom every spark of affection for Anna had long since died away, and his anger at her sudden appearance, in such a presence, and with such a charge against him, now robbed her almost of his pity. After a day and night spent in revelling, in the city, next evening he returned to his own apartments that overlooked the southern court of the palace, rejoicing alike at his narrow escape from disgrace, which was entirely owing to Morton's mismanagement, in consigning Anna to the guardianship of Alison Craig, and at his sudden fortune in

finding himself so favoured by Mary; and, with a rapture almost childish, he kissed the flower she had dropped so opportunely at the postern door, and which, like a treasure, he still preserved.

But the Earl knew not that in avoiding Scylla he had fallen into Charybdis; for on ascending to his apartments, up the stair to which he was formally preceded by French Paris and little Calder, he found himself confronted by one, of whom he now thought very little, but whose dark eyes—so soft, so pleading, and so imploring—he was confounded and abashed to meet:—the Countess!

She looked paler and thinner than when they had last met, and a pang of remorse wrung the Earl's heart as he surveyed her beautiful and slender form, so evidently wasted by sorrow and suffering; but the momentary sentiment passed away; ambition resumed its wonted power in his heart; and, though he kissed his wife's brow, it was done with an air so cold and conventional that she withdrew from his embrace, and at that time he cordially wished her ten thousand leagues away.

A moment the peer gazed upon her fair and sinless brow, and the steady gaze of her full dark eye, and he felt himself immensely her inferior in nobility of spirit, in truth, and love, and honour; and to his overweening pride that momentary sense of humiliation was bitter in the extreme.

"Welcome to Holyrood, Jane!" said he, assuming his usual gaiety of manner. "I warrant thou art come to upbraid me for playing the truant so long from thee and the bonny banks of Bothwell."

"Nay, my lord, I am on the way to my father's castle of Strathbolgie in the Garioch, and I seek but one night's shelter in these apartments. To-morrow I will continue my journey."

"Heaven be praised!" thought the Earl, who found it necessary to affect that proper regard which his cold expression showed plainly to have evaporated. "Seat thyself beside me, bonnibel—thou lookest sickly and ill. How comes this?"

"Canst thou ask?" she replied, with a mournful glance, and quietly withdrawing from the arm with which he had endeavoured to encircle her. "Thou hast been absent from me very long."

"And thou art tremendously angry with me, ladybird—is it not so?"

"Oh, no !" she replied gently ; " but sorrowful—exceeding sorrowful."

" And so thou lovest me still, Jane?"

" More than thou dost me," she replied, with her eyes full of tears ; and Bothwell felt one small ray of his old love kindle in his heart.

" I would a thousand times rather that thou didst reproach me bitterly than weep thus, Jane," said the Earl. " Thy scorn I might repel ; thine anger I might meet ; but thy tears—now, now, for Heaven's sake and thine own, be pacified ; for I do love thee fondly still."

" Love me !" reiterated the Countess, half suffocated by tears.

" Do not doubt me, dear one," replied the Earl, in whose bosom at that moment there was indeed something of a struggle ; " be pacified, bonnibel ! See—here is a charming bouquet for thee ; its perfume is alike reviving and delicious. I had it from the Queen."

The Countess made no reply, but her tears fell faster.

" And she, having heard of thy arrival, desired me to give it to thee," said the lying Earl, glad to say anything that would please her.

" Hah !" exclaimed the Countess, sharply, setting her teeth and growing deadly pale ; " is it so ? To me ? thou shalt see me inhale its perfume, *poisoned though it be*—for, oh, my husband ! even death at thy hands is welcome." And tremblingly she pressed her beautiful face into the bouquet, and then turned pale and placidly to the Earl.

" Poisoned !" he exclaimed, with astonishment. " Thou art mad, Jane ! Pshaw ! dost thou think that Mary of Scotland, (that being, pure as the new fallen snow,) is like her fiendish gude-mother, Catherine of Medici, a vendor of poisoned flowers, and gloves, and ribbons ? *Benedicite !* Jane of Huntly, shame on thy vile suspicions !"

" Well, I thank Heaven it is all as thou sayest !" replied the Countess, mildly ; " but after all I have heard of the love passages between Mary and thee at Hermitage, I expected somewhat worse."

" Love passages ? Woman, what hast thou dared to say ?" asked the Earl, gravely.

" Only a hint of what I have heard."

" From whom ?"

“The Earl of Sutherland.”

“Babbler that he is!” exclaimed Bothwell, with a dark frown.
“He hath foully lied, and so become guilty of lese-majesty.”

“Oh! do not look on me thus, my dear lord—I can bear anything but your frown. Thou wilt bring war, and death, and shame on the houses of Bothwell and Aboyne; but I mean not to upbraid thee. As thou sowest, so shalt thou reap; but for thy own sake, for the sake of thine ancestors, their name and fame and honour, the honour of me, whose peace thou hast destroyed, whose love thou hast scorned, whose ties thou hast forgotten, whose prospects thou hast blighted; I implore thee, by each and all of these, to pause, lest thou art crushed by the fall of the castle thine ambition is building.”

“I thank thee, Lady Bothwell,” replied the Earl, rising and putting on his bonnet, the lofty plumes of which he shook with ineffable hauteur; “I thank thee for these good intentions and kind regards, though, by the mass! I know not thine aim. And so thou art bound for Strathbolgie on the morrow, my gay Gordon? Who of my people accompany thee? Is it long Cockburn of Langton, with his lances of the Merse?”

“Nay; ’tis the Earl of Sutherland.”

A cloud gathered on Bothwell’s brow. The Earl of Sutherland had been a lover of the Countess from her girlhood, and had only given up his faithful suit on her accepting Bothwell; so there was a very unpleasant association of ideas in the mind of the latter, who was generally apt to view incidents through an evil medium.

“I trust the Lord Sutherland is well,” he said scornfully; “and that his bare-legged gillies, in brogues and breacan, will escort thee through Strathbolgie, as safely as Bothwell’s knights in their Milan mail would have done.”

“His sister, the Lady Elinora, accompanies us,” said the Countess colouring deeply, even at the suspicions of this husband, who loved her now no more.

“Then, my bonnibel, when thou goest hence to-morrow, fail not to make my very particular commendations to the Lady Elinora Sutherland, and the noble lord her brother, and so the benison of God be with thee, and him, and her;” and making a profound bow, he swaggered from the apartment, and hurried down stairs, glad to escape from the presence of the unhappy Countess.

His heart was moved when he saw her sink despairingly down on a cushioned window-seat ; but her having mentioned the Earl of Sutherland, had armed his better spirit against her ; and, not ill pleased that she had given a legitimate cause for anger and jealousy, affording him an apology to himself, he hurriedly crossed the palace yard, and without any defined purpose, entered the Artillery Park, a large common that lay to the eastward, and there he gave vent to his exciting reflections.

Mary was uppermost in his thoughts. The *flower* had sealed his fate, and that of Darnley too ! There had now opened before him a new vista of the most alluring kind—a vista which he determined to pursue. The love of the most beautiful of her sex—one occupying the summit of earthly rank—with his own indomitable pride, ambition, and obstinacy, led him on. Were Darnley, the sickly boy-king, to die of the premature disease that so evidently preyed upon him, or were he luckily to be slain in one of the innumerable brawls and feuds in which his life of debauchery and intrigue involved him, then Bothwell might hope to hold Mary, the bright, the beautiful and the winning, in his arms. He already felt the sceptre of Scotland in his grasp ; he saw the House of Hepburn seated on its throne ; and Moray, Morton, Mar, and all who had ever hated, feared, and wronged, or triumphed over him, in the days of his exile and poverty, grovelling at his feet.

If Mary (as he was bold enough to believe) loved him in secret, as a man of courage and gallantry it was *his* part to progress, as she could not make advances towards him. But Darnley must be removed ; and how ? for, though weak and ailing, he might live long enough ; and now was the time to strike some vigorous political stroke, which might raise him (Bothwell) to the giddy summit of his hopes, or hurl him for ever to destruction and infamy.

“The die is cast !” he exclaimed. “To this will I devote my life, my soul, my existence : and my very energy will raise me even as a demigod above my compeers. Yes, she loves me ! Curse on my blinded folly, that saw it not before ! and thrice cursed be this lordling of the Lennox, that bars my path to rap-ture and to power !”

“Pho ! hast thou not thy dagger ?” said a voice.

The Earl turned, and beheld the Lairds of Ormiston and Bolton ; the latter looking pale, and fierce, and agitated.

"How now, stout Bolton?" said the Earl. "What hath ruffled thy easy temper, and clouded that merry face of thine?"

"By the Rood of Broomholm! I will slay him, even as Fynart slew his ancestor at Lithgow Bridge, by one thrust of a sharp rapier—yea, in the face of men!" exclaimed Bolton.

"Whom meanest thou?"

"The Lord Darnley!"

"Soh! a rare speech, and a bold one, too, for the lieutenant of the guard!" said the Earl. "This is treason!"

"But even-handed justice, though," began Ormiston; "and by—"

"Now, peace with thy 'cock and pie.'"

"Bear with me a moment, my lord and friend, and I will tell thee how and whence this anger sprang."

But the cause thereof is of so much importance to this history, that it deserves a chapter to itself.

CHAPTER XLII.

MARIETTE AND DARNLEY.

MARIETTE HUBERT, the sister of Nicholas Hubert, or French Paris, one of Mary's favourite maids of honour, was the belle-idéal of a lively Parisian girl of eighteen; her eyes were large, and dark, and laughing; her features regular, piquant, and beautiful; her teeth like a row of orient pearls. She was always like a laughing Hebe: fresh, blooming, and smiling. Her black, glossy hair was drawn upwards, from temples whose snowy whiteness contrasted well with the sable wreaths. She was ever good-humoured, and gay to a fault, with a strong dash of wilfulness and coquetry.

In drollery, her lover, Sir John Hepburn, who had admired her long, was her very counterpart; though, by the influence of circumstances and the manners of the time, he was impetuous, obstinate, and quarrelsome; but there were few gallants who were otherwise at that factious and intriguing Court. Mariette, however, could smile him out of his anger, laugh him out of his obstinacies, coquette with him to please him, and with others to please herself. She could prattle, too, and caress him with a playfulness that were quite enchanting; and many a fierce feud

and desperate brawl were prevented by her tact, and by the power she could exert over her lover, who, in virtue of his command in Mary's archer guard, was hourly brought in angry contact with the armed nobles and their poor but proud followers ; but never was he more enchanted than when he discovered that his pretty and provoking Mariette was a better shot with the long bow at the butts than the best archer in the royal guard.

Though young Hepburn loved Mariette deeply and enthusiastically, he had failed in inspiring the volatile and fanciful French girl with a passion equal to his own.

She was gratified to find herself the object of attention from one who stood so high in the favour of Mary and the great Earl of Bothwell, and who was esteemed one of the handsomest gallants at a Court which, though shorn of the splendour that had characterised it under the late King James, nevertheless retained within its circle all that was splendid in Scotland. With all her coquetry, she dreaded to trifle with the jealousy of her assiduous lover ; for there was in his bosom a latent spark, that a little ruffling fanned into a flame ; and in the use of his sword he possessed that cavalier-like promptitude which was the leading characteristic of the Scottish gentleman before he lost caste.

The love he bore Mariette had become so much a part of himself, that Hepburn was no longer like other men, or what he had formerly been. He never had an idea in his head of which Mariette did not form a part. This passion affected his very manner, and interfered with his duties and occupations, imparting a newness and peculiarity to his bearing and manner, which drew upon him the raillery of Mary and her ladies, and the wicked wagging of the fair object herself.

Though never perfectly certain of possessing her whole and undivided heart, Hepburn received all the encouragement a lover could desire ; for Mariette loved to keep him in leading-strings, and attracted or repelled him just as she was in the mood to dally or be petulant ; and so, between hope and fear, and love and joy, a year had stolen away ; and though Hepburn fully considered Mariette as his ultimate wife, he knew not *when* the volatile girl, who wore his bracelets and rings, and gave him ribbons and ringlets in exchange, would yield her consent.

But a change came over the spirit of his dream, and suddenly he discovered (he knew not why) a change in Mariette.

He had frequently observed the profligate young king by her side; and then he began to experience a new and hitherto unknown agony gnawing at his heart, and from thence it seemed to spread through every nerve and fibre. When they were together, he followed with painful interest every movement and expression of Darnley, and could easily perceive that his eyes were full of ardour when he gazed on Mariette, and that her downcast face, so interesting by its waving locks and long, dark lashes, wore a soft smile whenever he whispered in her ear.

The lover's impetuous heart became torn by wrath and jealousy, and terrible ideas of revenge began to float before him; for, daring and profligate as he knew Darnley to be, he was more than ever astonished at his cool presumption in addressing Mariette Hubert as a lover under his very eyes.

On the day succeeding that we have mentioned, when the famous scene took place at the dial-stone in the royal garden, the lieutenant of the archers, watching a time when the indefatigable royal *roué* left Mariette alone, approached her. She was seated on a stone sofa; and she who was wont to have eyes only for him, neither saw nor heard him, till he lightly touched her soft shoulder, and then she raised her blushing face, which immediately became ashy pale.

"Thou seemest absent, dear Mariette," said he.

"I wish that thou wert absent, too!" she replied pettishly, plucking leaf by leaf a flower the King had given her.

"Mariette, look at me. What hath come over thee? Art thou bewitched?" asked the young man, in a voice of anger and tenderness curiously blended; for he could not stoop to acknowledge the suspicions which filled his heart with bitterness and rage. "Wherefore art thou now so strange, so altered, so reserved, to one who loves thee so well, whose every thought is of thee, and whose whole heart is full of thee? Oh, unkind Mariette!"

She changed colour and trembled; but, without raising her dark eyes, continued in confusion and abstraction to pluck the leaves of the flower.

"Grant me patience, Heaven!" muttered her impetuous lover, whose sorrow still overpowered his rising wrath; "dearest Mariette, the gossips of our court (God's malison on them!) say that thy heart is changed towards me; is—is this true?"

"No."

"By St. Bothan ! that *no* sounds too like *yes* to mean anything else," exclaimed Bolton, giving way to his passion and jealousy ; "but if thou forgettest my faithful love, and preferrest the passing admiration of this silken squire o' dames—this earpet-king and holiday moth—whose proffered love is alike insulting and dishonourable, marry, come up ! I say, Mademoiselle Mariette—I wish thee joy !" and, with a profound bow and glance of irony, he turned away.

Stung by his words and manner, which were partly assumed, Mariette Hubert, who had been repenting the too serious encouragement given, and still more a fatal promise made to the young king, now bent all her thoughts upon him, and endeavoured to banish Hepburn from her memory ; while he, with all a lover's indecision, walked slowly away, deploring in his heart the outburst, which he was too proud and still too indignant to repair. Mariette gazed after him with her cheek flushing, and her dark eyes full of fire, and so they parted—for the last time.

"Fool that I was to love a Frenchwoman !" thought the lover.

That night, as was his wont and duty, Hepburn, as lieutenant of the guard, made his round of the archer sentinels posted at the various gates of the palace, which was then, as we have said, a very irregular but spacious edifice, containing five courts, with various offices, stables, falcomries, and kennels attached.

The night was dark and still, and a few large drops of rain plashed on the pavement as he passed through the palace yard ; while the red sheet-lightning, flashing in the north, revealed at times the black outline of the Calton hill. Hepburn, in half armour, with his visor up, entered the gardens by that ancient doorway which faces the south, and is ornamented by the Scottish arms and order of the Thistle. The clock of the chapel tolled ten, and on passing the corner of James V.'s tower, he looked up to the tall casements of the Queen's apartments, to discover the usual light in that of Mariette, though he knew she would not be visible to him to-night. Every window was dark as that of the deserted chamber in which Rizzio was murdered, and the floor of which was yet stained with his blood.

As Hepburn stood among the shrubbery, he perceived two figures approach with all the caution of conspirators ; and at once discovered one of them, from his stature and bearing, to be the king. He was muffled in a mantle, and wore a mask and

coat-of-mail. The other was his favourite page, Master Andrew Macaige, and they carried between them a long light ladder, which they had purloined from the stable-yard.

Darnley clapped his hands, and then, from amid the square colossal mass of James V's tower, which was all buried in darkness and obscurity, a single ray of light shot forth into the garden, a female appeared, and, while thoughts of grief, and wrath, and horror, poured like a deluge upon the mind of Hepburn, he recognised his long-loved Mariette Hubert! He remained in a stupor, and heard the ladder jar as the adventurous prince placed it against the wall, and saw him, after wrapping his mantle round his left arm, and belting his sword higher up, ascend with considerable agility into the apartment, after which the window was immediately closed, and the light extinguished. The page carried off the ladder to a secret place, not three yards from where Hepburn stood, and, rolling himself up in his mantle lay composedly down upon it to sleep until he was summoned by the king.

The spell that had weighed like an incubus upon the faculties of the lover, now passed away. His first impulse prompted him to put his foot upon the page's neck and strangle him; his second, to wait the re-appearance of the king, and slay him without mercy. But these fierce promptings were left unacted, and he turned away to seek Bothwell, of whose secret hopes and long-cherished rivalry and hatred to Darnley he had seen so many proofs. He raised his visor higher, for he felt almost suffocated as he hurried through the cloisters. There he met Hob of Ormiston, also searching for the Earl, who, an archer informed them, had just entered the Artillery Park.

With a manner that was marked with the deepest excitement, the young knight related, not very coherently, the substance of the preceding affair; and, unseen in the dark, a quiet laugh spread over Hob's malicious visage at the wrath and disappointment of his friend; but it was otherwise with the Earl, who foresaw in all this something to further his own ambitious schemes.

"I sought thee, Bothwell," said Hob, "to say that an especial gentleman of the Lord Morton's train (no other than the Knight of Spott), hath come with the Earl's best commendations to your lordship, and to say that he and the Lord Moray, and one or two others thou wottest of, are even now assembled at

the castle of Craigmillar, where the queen went about sunset, and where they crave your lordship's suit, service, and attendance. I have ordered our horses!—"

"Thou ravest, Ormiston. Morton and Moray are my mortal foes; and truly no fault is it of mine that they breathe the breath of this life to-night! Anent what is this meeting?"

"The Lord Darnley," replied Ormiston, lowering his gruff voice.

"Ha!"

"And the best mode to rid Scotland and the queen too of his foolish misgovernment, and the tyranny of Earl Mathew and the house of Lennox, who, thou knowest, would gladly cut off thee and them, and everybody but themselves, if an opportunity occurred."

"By Jove, Hob! thou art a rash knave, and a bold one, to speak thus; but thou knowest that the queen declined peremptorily the divorce offered her by several Lords of the parliament."

"True; hence this meeting, at which thou art expected to be leader and chief to obtain—"

"What?"

"A divorce from Darnley! that Mary may marry again, for her own happiness and the commonweal of Scotland. Thou well knowest how miserable this popinjay squire maketh her. And are we—bearded men who rebelled against James V.—to submit to this new caterpillar? I trow not!"

Bothwell's bosom glowed as Ormiston spoke; but he said sadly—

"Thou forgettest that she is of the Church of Rome, and that, being so, she may not wed again. So what availeth a divorce?"

"Psha! 'tis long since I thought much about the Church of Rome."

"I am sure his holiness, poor carle! deplored *thy* loss; but here is French Paris with our horses. Dismount, Nick, and give thy dapple to Bolton; so now for Craigmillar—ho! I go at all events."

They mounted and set forth by the old bridle-road that ascended the hill of St. John, and in a few minutes the great façade of the palace, the tall and spectral edifices of the Canon-gate, the city, with its walls and gates and twinkling lights, was

left behind, as they debouched upon the open country, which was all wood, and marsh, and pasture land, from the outer walls to the castle of the Provost. On their right, for a mile or two, lay the common muir of the city, bordered by the bleak hills of Braid; and on the left lay Salisbury's ridgy craigs and Arthur's seat, with the deep blue loch of Duddingstone washing its base, reflecting the stars in its bosom, and the dark shadow of the wooded knoll, where, then a ruin, lay the old Saxon kirk in solitude.

Skirting the lake they struck into the horse-way, that, between thickets of fir, led straight to the venerable stronghold of the knights of Gourtown, which they saw looming before them in the starlight, with its great square keep and double flanking towers, barbican, and ditch.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE PLOT THICKENS.—THE CONFERENCE OF CRAIGMILLAR.

THE celebrated conference of Craigmillar, is recorded too particularly in our national history to be expatiated on here; nevertheless, a brief notice is necessary to preserve the unity of the Magister Absalom's narrative.

In the apartment of the Lord Argyle, in that old feudal fortress, met Bothwell and his brother-in-law Huntly, with Moray—openly their friend, and secretly their foe—for frequently had they conspired each other's death by secret fraud and open violence; and Moray had personally defeated, and caused the death of the old Earl, George of Huntly, at the recent battle of Corrichie. There, too, came the secretary of state, the great Sir William Maitland of Lethington, who, notwithstanding his skill in government and statecraft, lost his head in the desperate game of politics seven years after.

This conference was held around the dais on which stood the couch of Argyle, who was labouring under a severe illness.

Long and eloquently the talented secretary expatiated on the evils that had resulted to the Scottish people, from Mary's ill-assorted marriage with the young and profligate Lord of Darnley; the rebellion it had brought forth among the adherents of Chatelherault, in the west; among the Gordons in the north; and the general discontent it had occasioned by the peculiar

religious tenets of the house of Lennox—a marriage against which Master Knox had bitterly and abusively inveighed, and which, to the loving, trusting, and devoted Mary, had become a source of hourly misery; for the passing love of the profligate, unmindful of her exalted rank, her matchless beauty, her sweetness of manner and charming vivacity, had wandered to many inferior and unworthy objects. Among these he had squandered his patrimony, and the revenues of a crown which he disgraced; thus, completely estranging the heart of the queen, by a career of insult, neglect, and riot; by the hourly scandals he committed in her palaces, and chief of all by the murder of her harmless secretary—thus making the breach irreparable by his lacking the art and condescension to repair it.

He spoke, too, of those powerful barons who were still enduring banishment as accessories to the destruction of the hapless Rizzio, whose overweening pride and Italian birth had been his only crime; barons, noble in descent and venerated in name the kinsmen of those he addressed; the veteran Kerr, whose ponderous ghisarma had done his country such service at Pinkiecleugh; Patrick Lord Ruthven, then lying ill of a deadly sickness in an English frontier village; the Laird of Pitarrow and the Tutor of Pitcur, all brave Scottish knights, who were enduring great misery in the land of our hereditary foes, by the seizure of their ancestral castles and the confiscation of their estates; and who, by the subversion of the house of Lennox, would be restored to their country and friends, and released from a degrading position among Englishmen—and the change he would propose, could only be effected by the divorce of the young queen from her cousin.

The Earl of Moray, (who, with Morton, had been the secretary's active colleague in the Rizzio murder), for private and ambitious views of his own, from an early period had vehemently opposed her marriage, and even proceeded so far as to take up arms against it in 1565. He still, as we are told, "pursued the old conspiracy against the king's life," urging the divorce with all his eloquence; and it may easily be believed that, though his mortal foe, Bothwell seconded him on this occasion with an ardour the source of which the wily Earl was not slow in perceiving; and, together, they spared not the powers of invention and persuasion in obviating Argyle's many

doubts that the queen "would consent to a measure so indelicate and unpleasant as a divorce."

Full of ardour, as this new ray of hope dawned upon him at a time so opportune, the Earl was more eloquent even than the subtle secretary ; but the morning sun shone through the barred windows, as red amid October clouds he rose above Soltra edge, ere they came to a decision ; and the Earl of Moray, and Lethington, the Machiavel of Mary's court, undertook to urge the measure upon her with all their eloquence and skill. Bothwell, with proper delicacy, and policy too, declined being one of the deputation, for whose success he would have prayed, had he not forgotten the way, in these days of reformation and misrule.

They left the apartment on their mission, for the queen was now up, and said to be walking in the castle garden, where she daily offered food to four stately swans that floated on the lake, which, in the form of a gigantic P, (the first letter of Preston, the baron's name), occupied one half of the ground. It is still distinctly traceable to the southward of the ruins, and was then supplied by the same springs that filled the moat on the north.

Bothwell leaned against a window, watching the sunrise, and he could hear his own heart beating. Exhausted by illness, and the fatigue of the conference, Argyle, after his page had given him a drink of ptisan from a silver cup, had fallen sound asleep. Huntly, perplexed and full of bitter thoughts, turned over the leaves of an old brass-bound and wooden-boarded tome—THE CHRONICLE OF YE NOBLE AND VALIANT EARLE OF FLANDERS, QUHO MARRIED THE DEVIL ; and he lay back, half-hidden in the deep recess of the tower window, and never once addressed his brother-in-law, to whose ambitious aspirations, and open neglect of his beautiful sister, he was now no stranger. And thus, though his eyes were on Jehan Trepperel's black-letter pages, it was perfectly apparent, by his knitted brows and sullen silence, that his thoughts were elsewhere.

The sun soared high in the blue vault ; white as snow the morning mists rolled up from the dell that was traversed by Lothian burn, on the margin of which, a little hamlet of neatly ornamented cottages had been built for the French attendants of Mary ; and these, though changed in aspect, are still known as Little France. The pale smoke ascended in columns into the pure air from the village of Niddry Mareschal, which, with

its chapel, dedicated to the Holy Virgin by Wauchope, baron of Niddry, nestled among the brown autumnal copsewood to the east. The woods of Edmiston were bare and yellow; and the hill on which the lords of Craigmillar had reared up their strong square tower of the twelfth century, was arid with whins, and gloomy with clumps of the dark Scottish fir.

The time, and importance of the circumstances under which he viewed it, deeply impressed every feature of that morning landscape on the Earl's memory. His fate, and that of Scotland too, hung perhaps upon the queen's decision; and love and pride, ambition to achieve, and revenge to gratify, all kindled a glow of anxiety in his bosom, that amounted to torture.

Slowly the minutes passed on!

An hour wore away; he thought they would never re-appear. Argyle still slept, and Huntly had at last become absorbed in the pages of "The Valziant Earle;" for, thanks to the tutorship of old Gavin Dunbar, he *could* read a little.

At last the deputation returned; Huntly closed his book, Argyle woke up, and Moray gave one of his cold and mild smiles on seeing Bothwell's paleness and anxiety.

"She hath consented, sirs?" he asked in a breathless tone.

"Nay, my lord, she declined so peremptorily that we felt our heads shake on our shoulders," replied the secretary; "and, by the rood! I never knew my statecraft and natural oiliness of tongue so far fail me in doing service to myself and friends. So here endeth all hope of a divorce; for, though King Henry hateth and feareth her, as a burnt child doth the fire, and though she wept bitterly—yea, like an abandoned Dido, at his coldness and cruelty, and small love for her—she avows that she will rather die than divorce him."

"And wherefore, thinkest thou, sir William?"

"He was her first love, and only one; and, changed though he be, her heart yet yearneth towards him; for though a queen, we find her a very woman yet."

"Then farewell, my lords," said the Earl, assuming his cloak and mantle; "I must wend townward betimes;" and he hurried to the court-yard, summoning Ormiston and Hepburn, who had been stretched on benches by the hall fire, the one asleep, and the other nursing his wrath. They all mounted and galloped back to the city.

"Well, my lord, how went the conference?" asked Hob.

"She hath declined—proudly and wrathfully declined!"

"Cock and pie!"

"Yea, Ormiston, with anger and with tears."

"All woman's caprice. Tears! Tush! they should give thee hope. The world—"

"Malediction on the world! it smiles on all but me."

"For thy comfort, I will tell thee a project which hath just been put into my head."

"By whom?"

"The devil, who, as thou knowest, never lies dead in the ditch. Approach me"—and, raising his visor, Ormiston whispered something to the Earl, who started; and Hepburn, who watched them with a keen eye, exclaimed—

"Speak forth, Hob of Ormiston; for I see there is assassination in thine eye, and here stand I, John Hepburn of Bolton, ready to be thine abettor, in any deed of stouthrief or bloodshed; for I am frantic in heart, frenzied in head, and ready to ride above my stirrups in the blood of the Stuarts of Lennox!"

"No, no," replied the Earl; "Hepburn, thou hast thine own wrongs, and mayest avenge them; but Ormiston, what is this thou hast said to me? No, no, get thee behind me, thou tall limb of Satan, I will have none of thy tempting."

Ormiston gave one of his deep hoarse laughs that shook every joint of the mail in which his muscular figure was sheathed; and, spurring their steeds, they rode furiously back to the city, by the old road that then passed close to the solitary chapel of St. John the Baptist, on the burgh-muir, and entered Edinburgh by the Old Horse Wynd, a street that led to the porch of Holyrood Palace.



CHAPTER XLIV

FATHER TARBET.

THREE months passed away, and the spring of 1567 was at hand.

Bothwell's love for Mary had grown more and more a part of his existence, fostered as it was by the cunning of her brother the Earl of Moray, whose boundless ambition made him hope that ultimately something great might accrue to himself, were this wild passion properly moulded; for Moray had early formed

a hope of usurping the throne—a hope based upon the queen's unpopularity as a Catholic, his own great influence, and the helpless infaney of his nephew, James, the little crown prince of Seotland.

"He hated Darnley," says Robertson; "and was no less hated by him. In order to be *revenged*, he entered into a sudden friendship with Bothwell, his ancient and mortal enemy. He encouraged him to crime, by giving him hopes of marrying the queen. All this was done with a design to throw upon the queen herself the imputation of being accessary to the murder (of Darnley), and under that pretext to destroy Bothwell next—to depose and imprison her, and to retain the sceptre which he had wrested out of her hands."

The "godly" Earl saw all this in the distance; and the mistaken Bothwell, whose daring hopes and unruly ambition he fostered and cajoled, now sought his society as sedulously as before he had shunned it. He had long been rid of Anna, who had been conveyed to her native Norway, in charge of Christian Alborg, in the Biornen; and as for his Countess, who resided in her father's solitary castle of Strathbolgie, among the woods and wilds of the Garioch, he never bestowed a thought on her. While her own brother, borne away by the tide of politics, and infected by the spirit of ambition and intrigue that pervaded all, had resolved to sacrifice even her to the giant projects formed by Bothwell and the nobles of his faction.

Mary had resided alternately in Holyrood, and at her summer castle of Craigmillar; but since the scene by the garden-dial, had never again given the Earl an opportunity of addressing her alone; and, even in the presence of her courtiers, she curbed her natural vivacity and gaiety of manner, and addressed him with marked reserve.

In the old tower of Holyrood, enclosed by strong grilles and vigilant archers of the guard, Konrad passed three months in hopeless and tedious monotony—hopeless, because he knew not what might be his fate; and tedious, because unmarked by any change, save the day-dawn and the sunset, the morning visit of the archer who brought his breakfast, and the nightly one of the warder, who secured all gates and doors when St. Giles' bell struck ten.

So passed the time.

Winter came, and the bleak summit of the Calton was covered

with snow; the trees around the palace, and the old orchards that crowned the Abbeyhill, were leafless and bare; and drearily looked the chapel-royal and ancient cloisters, with snow mantling their carved battlements and time-worn knosps and pinnacles.

Then the poor prisoner sighed for his native hills, and night after night his dreams brought them before him in all their wild sublimity and picturesque desolation. Again he was among them in all the happiness of boyhood, with Anna by his side, as she had been in the days when first he learned to love her—when they had sought the wild daisy and the mountain bee by the green base of the lofty Dovrefeldt, whose summit was glistening with impending glaciery, and crowned by eternal snows; whose old primeval forests were the abode of the bear and eagle, and its unfathomed caverns, of Druid ghosts, of demon dwarfs, and one-eyed gnomes; whose sides were terrible with chasms split by the hammer of Thor, and overshadowed by the petrified giants whom, in the days of other years, his breath had turned into stone. In his dreams, too, he heard the dash of the free and boundless ocean that rolled on his native shore; and he saw the vast Moskenstrom, that dark and fearful abyss, around which for ever boil the eternal waves; in whose deep whirl the largest wrecks are sucked like reeds down—down—to be carried through the bowels of the inner earth, and vomited on the desolate shores of the Bothnian Gulf; and from these stirring dreams of his distant home, and the love and freedom of his boyhood, poor Konrad awoke in agony to find himself a captive and a slave, a prisoner without a crime; in a foreign land, unpitied and uncared for, and without a hope of reprieve, save death. Often he exclaimed aloud, as he clasped his fettered hands; for loneliness had taught him to commune with himself—

“How many a giant project have I formed in secrecy and solitude, when inspired alike by the ardour of youth and love, and *here* they end! Oh, Anna! dearly hath thy perfidy cost the heart that loved thee well!”

He was often visited by Hepburn of Bolton, who, by Bothwell's directions, had him under his immediate guardianship, and, being a blunt and soldierly young man, whose heart had been as yet unseared by jealousy or disappointment, and then felt happy in the ideal love of his Mariette, to console the prisoner, brought now and then a stoup of Rochelle under his

mantle; and was wont to converse with him so winningly and frankly, that he learned the particulars of his story, and the errand which made him seek the Scottish shore.

"St. Bothan! but thou art a rare fellow, Master Konrad," said Bolton. "Loving this damsel, and yet labouring to restore her to the arms of a rival. Rare platonism—by the mass!"

"Sir, thou knowest not the pure sentiment of love that animated me. So refined was my passion for this fair being: that so far from being happy in possessing her, if she loved me not, I would have preferred to see her happiness increased by the love of a rival—"

"Mass! if I understand either this or thee," said the lieutenant of the archers, sipping his Rochelle with a face of perplexity. "But I pray Heaven I may never have reason to argue thus with myself! A blow from my poniard, or a bow-shot at fifty paces, were worth a thousand such homilies."

"Oh, yes!" continued Konrad, clasping his hands; "my love, though deep, and passionate, and true, was divested of every sensual thought. I had schooled myself to joy when Anna rejoiced; to sorrow when Anna wept."

"I am no casuist," said Bolton; "but I think thou feedest thy imagination rather than thy love, which must die, as it is hopeless."

"It sought *her* happiness, not my own—and thus it cannot die."

The young Scottish knight could not perceive this altogether; but he admired Konrad without knowing why, and, to cheer his solitude, introduced to the same prison Sir James Tarbet, the old priest before mentioned, and who had still a few weeks of his term of captivity to endure—a captivity imposed on all who dared to celebrate mass, since it had been forbidden by law as an idolatrous ceremony, dedicated to the devil and scarlet woman.

This good man, who was now in his seventieth year, had served his country in his youth at the fields of Flodden, Solway Moss, and Pinkiecleugh, and, though bent by the infirmities of age and three spear-wounds, somewhat of the old bearing of the knight shone through the mild manner and chastened aspect of the Catholic priest; and in his eye and voice there were those mild and winning expressions which the followers of Ignatius Loyola are said alone to acquire. His forehead was high, and

his falling locks were thin. His magnificent beard, white as snow, lent a dignity to his aspect; and his figure had a stateliness, of which not even his tattered doublet of grey cloth, his hodden mantle, and ruffless shirt could deprive it. And yet, though changed in aspect, the time had been when, sheathed in bright armour, he had spurred his barbed horse through the thickest battalions of Surrey and Somerset, and, in the rich vestments of a canon of St. Giles, had held aloft the consecrated host on the great altar of that grand Cathedral when the sance bell rang, the organ pealed through all its echoing aisles, and while thousands of Edina's best and bravest, her noblest and her greatest, knelt with bent knees and bowed heads on the pavement of the chancel, choir, and nave, before the glittering star of the upheld Eucharist.

By his manner, when bestowing upon him a silent benediction, Konrad at once recognised a priest of the ancient Church, and he kissed the old man's hand with fervour.

"For what art thou here, father?" he asked.

"For worshipping God as he has been worshipped since his Son left the earth," replied the old man. "But now Scotland's apostate priests and unlettered barons have discovered that the forms and prayers of fifteen centuries are idolatrous and superstitious, and severe laws are laid upon us. A gentleman pays a hundred pounds to the Crown if he be discovered at mass; a yeoman forty for the first fault, and *death* for the second."

"I would then, father, that I were back in old Norway, and thou with me; for there we can worship God as we will."

Interested by the young man's gentle manner, Sir James Tarbet requested to be informed of the crime for which he suffered; and Konrad, who had but a confused idea of the chain of circumstances by which he was then a prisoner, attributed the whole to the malevolence of Bothwell; and when he concluded the history of his life and troubles—for to the aged canon he told everything with confidence and hope, and without reservation—he mingled with it several threats of ultimate vengeance on the author of his long oppression and Anna's wrongs.

"This must not be!" replied the priest. "By studying vengeance thou keepest open thine own wounds, and pourest salt into them, so that they never heal, or are forgotten. Forgive this sinful Earl, and thou conquerest him; forgive him for the sake of the sisterly love thou bearest this Lady Anna, who loves

him so well. 'Be patient,' saith a wise Arabian, 'and the leaf of the mulberry-tree will become satin.' By avoiding misery, thou wilt find happiness; for misery tormenteth itself. O my son! if, like me, thou wert aged and insensible to every emotion save pity and compassion, thou wouldst know that the expectation of eternal happiness in the world that is to come will raise one far above the petty strife and turmoil of this."

Konrad sighed, but made no reply.

"One virtue," continued the priest, "will counterbalance a hundred vices; and if the Earl of Bothwell—ha! thou knittest thy brow with wrath and hatred. Remember that he who cherisheth either is like unto the fallen angels."

"I am but a mere man, father, and know that none would scorn me more for woman weakness than that proud noble, were I to say unto him, 'Earl Bothwell, I forgive thee!'"

"Nay—bethink thee! he is most deserving of scorn who scorneth the humble; even as he is the weakest who oppresseth the weak."

"True it is, father!" exclaimed Konrad, striking together his fettered hands; "then here end all my visions of love and honour—my day-dreams of ambition and joy."

"Say not of joy, or to what purpose serve my exhortations?"

"Father," said Konrad, "I am very desolate and broken in spirit, and there are moments in my times of exceeding misery and depression, when I would willingly seek in the Church for that refuge which our holy religion affords us; but I fear I am too much wedded to the world, and am too young for a sacrifice so serious."

"Say not so!" replied Sir James Tarbet with animation, for at such a crisis of the Catholic Church such sentiments were priceless to its upholders. "Youth lendeth additional grace to the practice of religion. Of this I will talk with thee more anon; and I trust that the day may come when I shall see thee hold aloft the blessed sacrament on that holy altar which this infatuated people have prostrated for a time—I say, but for a time; for lo! again I see it rising phoenix-like from its ashes, in greater splendour than ever the middle ages saw!"

Fired by the energy of the priest, who seemed like something ethereal, as the noon-day sun streamed in a blaze of glory through the grated window on his kindling eyes and silver beard, and soothed by his manner and discourse, Konrad felt a new and

hitherto unknown glow in his bosom, especially when the old man knelt down, saying—

“Pray with me, for this is the festival of Saint Edmund, the king and martyr; but, like many another consecrated day, it passes now in Scotland’s hills and glens, unmarked by piety and prayer; for now, her sons can view with apathy the ruins of her altars, and the grass growing green in the aisles where their fathers prayed, and where their bones repose.”

CHAPTER XLV.

THE WHISPER.

THE whisper of Hob of Ormiston had not been lost on the Earl; hourly it haunted him; he thought of it by day, he dreamt of it by night.

Amid the pleasures of the table, the noise of the midnight revel, the ceremonies of the Court, the debates of the council, the solemnities of the Church, in the glare of the noonday sun, and, worst of all, in the silence of the voiceless night, that fatal whisper was in his ear, and fanning the latent spark of hell that lay smouldering in his heart.

He deemed himself predestined to accomplish that terrible advice; but still his soul recoiled within itself, and even the ardour of his love for Mary, and his hatred of her husband, were stifled for a time at the terrible contemplation. Life lost its pleasures—power and feudal splendour their zest; his employments were neglected; his attire, usually so magnificent, was never as it used to be—for a change had come over him, and that change was apparent to all. Mary could perceive that, at times, a dusky fire filled his dark and gloomy eyes, and then she immediately shunned their gaze. His brow had become pale and veined, and marked by thought and care. The gentle Queen pitied him; and when compelled to address him (for he was still her most distinguished courtier), she did so with a kindness and reserve that only added fuel to the secret flame that preyed upon the Earl’s heart.

The coldness, separation, and unconcealed dislike between Mary and King Henry still continued, and they were, to all appearance, irreconcilable; till he, after running headlong on a

frightful career of luxury and mad riot at Glasgow, where he was residing at his father's mansion of Limmerfield, was seized with a deadly fever, which ended in that dreadful and loathsome disease, the small-pox, then very prevalent in the west country. And now, when prostrated in all his energies, abandoned by friends and foes, by the panders, and jockies, and boon companions among whom he had squandered his health and wealth, his own peace and the peace of his queen and wife—she nobly was the *first* who flew to his succour.

With a small train she departed in haste to the infant capital of the west; and Bothwell, who, with all his love, could not accompany her on such a visit, (though he admired her the more for it), accompanied by Ormiston and Bolton, set out for the house of Whittinghame, a stately fortalice in his constabulary of Haddington, and belonging to Archibald Douglas, a kinsman and adherent of the Earl of Morton.

By a strange coincidence, rather than a mutual compact, many other peers and barons who were hostile to the house of Lennox and its heir, were then also visiting the intriguing lord of Whittinghame; and, like several rills uniting in a river, the whole current of their conversation, thoughts, and sentiments, were bent on the destruction of the Stuarts of Lennox, either by secret and Machiavelian fraud, or in the good old Scottish fashion, with the displayed banner and uplifted spear.

The darkness of a winter night had closed over the keep and woods of Whittinghame; there was no snow on the ground, but as the sky was starless the gloom was intense. Sheet-lightning at times illumined the far horizon, and brought forward strong in relief from the lurid background, the black and towering cones of Gulane hill and Berwick's lofty law—that landmark of the German sea—but all was still, and not a branch stirring in the leafless woods, when silently and noiselessly, all well armed, masked, and muffled in their mantles, the guests of the lord of Whittinghame assembled under the sepulchral shadow of a great and venerable yew-tree, that still stands near the castle wall, and is pointed out to the curious as the scene of their meeting.

Thick and impervious, the yew cast its umbrageous shade above them, and formed a fitting canopy for such a conclave of darkness and desperation; and heavily the chill dew dripped from the pendant branches.

There were present four peers and several of the lesser barons ; Argyle, the proud but wavering Huntly, and Morton, cool and determined, and Bothwell, now the arch conspirator and Cataline of the conclave, with knit brows and clenched hands ; a bloodless cheek, and lips compressed and pallid ; a tongue that trembled alternately between the very load of eloquence that oppressed it, and the darkness of the purpose to which that dangerous eloquence was directed.

How little did some of these conspirators divine the other sentiment, so wild and guilty, that was making public utility an excuse for regicide ; and that filled with an agony, almost amounting to suffocation, the breast of Scotland's greatest earl.

Near him stood his friend and evil Mentor, that double-tongued master of intrigue and prince of plotters, Maitland the secretary, with his broad and massive brow, so high, so pale, and intellectual, his eagle eye and thin lips ; and black Ormiston, the muscular and strong, whose qualities were those of the body only—the iron baron of his time, unscrupulous and blood-thirsty ; from childhood inured to rapine, strife, and slaughter ; while Bolton, the young and handsome, inspired to seek all the vengeance that rivalry and scorned love could prompt, was by turns as fierce as Morton, as politic and cruel as Maitland, as sullen as Argyle.

And there, in whispers, under that old sepulchral yew, was debated and resolved on that deed of treason, of darkness, and of horror, that from Scotland's capital was to send forth an echo over Europe—an echo that would never die—the murder of King Henry, as a fool and tyrant, who had rendered himself intolerable to the people. What passed is unknown, for history has failed to record it ; and not even the voluminous rolls of Magister Absalom Beyer can supply the blank, save in one instance. Ormiston, with a treachery at which we blush in a Scottish baron, proposed that the Norwegian prisoner in Holyrood might easily be made a valuable tool in the affair ; and that, by some adroitness, the whole blame of the projected assassination might be thrown upon him. This motion, which exactly suited his own ideas and taste, was warmly applauded by the Earl of Morton, and agreed to by the others, who cared not a jot about the matter.

The die was cast—the deed resolved on.

Then from beneath his mantle, the learned knight of Pitten-

drieck, the Lord President of the supreme court, (a man still famous for his works on Scottish law), drew forth a parchment, written and prepared with more than legal accuracy, and more than wolfish cruelty, by which they each and all bound themselves to stand by each other, in weal or woe, in victory or triumph, in defeat and death, with tower and vassal, life and limb; and to this bond they each in succession placed their seals and marks, or signatures; and feebly fell the light of a flickering taper on their pale visages and fierce eyes, as they appended their dishonoured titles to that Draconian deed, which the pale secretary received, and put up in his secret pocket, with such a smile as Satan would have done the assignment of their souls.*

Now with some precipitation they all prepared to separate.

"Farewell, laird of Whittinghame!" said Bothwell, as he leaped upon his horse, feeling that the probable excitement of a hard gallop would be a relief from his own thoughts, or more congenial with their impetuosity; "and farewell, my lords and gentlemen! Now for the bloody game, and Scotland, be thou my chess-board of battle! There shall I make knights and queens, and rooks and pawns, to move at my will, and to vanish when I list. Mount, Ormiston! and ho—for Edinburgh!"

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE MOTHER AND HER CHILD.

WITH the dogged resolution of one who neither will nor knows how to swerve from a purpose, Bothwell, with Ormiston and Bolton, laid their plans with Morton and others for the accomplishment of their terrible combat.

Any qualms the Earl had, were nearly stifled by the intelligence of Mary's complete reconciliation with her husband, for whom all her natural tenderness, as the first love and choice of her heart, returned; and, notwithstanding the loathly and disfiguring disease under which he laboured, and the great per-

* Mr. Carte, from a letter of Monsieur de Fenelon, 5th January, 1574, acquaints us, that Ormiston confessed that the Earl of Bothwell showed him a *paper* subscribed by the Earls of Argyle, Huntly, and Morton, Sir James Balfour, and Secretary Maitland, promising him assistance in murdering the king. Various other authors give us proofs of the existence of this document.—See *Goodal*, vol. i.

sonal risk incurred by herself, like a "ministering angel" she hung over the sick-bed of the repentant profligate, who frequently implored her pardon and forgiveness—and in tears poor Mary blessed and forgave him.

Exaggerated tidings of these passages fired the fierce soul of the Earl with jealousy and wrath, at what he deemed the mere caprice of a pretty woman; but the gage had been thrown to fate, and a cloud was gathering over Mary's thorny crown, which as yet she neither saw nor felt.

His youth, and the natural strength of his constitution, enabled the young king to surmount that disease which had baffled the skill of Maitre Picauet, the half quack, half astrologer leech, who attended him; and, as soon as he was convalescent, the queen had him conveyed in a soft litter, by easy stages, to the capital, hoping that by the luxuries procurable there, the purity of the air, and better attendance, he might be fully restored to health and to her.

Upon this the conspirators, still alive to their intentions, sent the Lord President of the College of Justice to make offer of an ancient mansion that was situated on rising ground to the southward of Edinburgh, exposed to the pure breeze beyond the city walls, from the woods of the burgh-muir, and the beautiful sheet of water which they bordered. The unsuspecting Mary gratefully accepted the courteous offer, and there the poor young king was conveyed to—die.

This house belonged to the Lord President's brother, Robert Balfour, Provost of "the Collegiate Kirk of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Fields." It had long been uninhabited; and was situated, says Buchanan, in a lonesome and solitary place, between the ruins of two churches, "where no noise or outcry could be heard." It stood without the city walls, on the site **now** occupied by Drummond-street.

Small, ancient, and massive, it was probably coeval with its church, which had been built in 1220 by Alexander II. Its front faced the west; and from thence a view from the windows extended over fields to the hamlet of Lauriston. Its northern gable was so close to the strong wall of the city, that its principal door was but *one* pace distant from an arched postern which is still discernible in the former, and was then flanked by a massive tower. To the westward lay the Kirk-of-Field, a great cross church with buttressed walls and pointed windows,

for so it is shown in a print of 1544. To the eastward lay the ruins of the Dominican monastery, which had been burned down in 1528. Of these the fragment of a tower still survived, with an ancient gate, bearing in Saxon characters the same legend still remaining to this day in the wall of the Kirk-of-Field Wynd, which now bears another name—

Ave Maria, gratia plena Dominus tecum.

i. e., “Hail Mary! full with grace—the Lord be with you.” On the south the fields extended to the spacious common muir of the city, which was shaded by many a Druid oak; and to the eastward the ground descended suddenly into the lonely valley at the foot of Salisbury craigs. To the north lay the long line of the city ramparts, with the barrier-ports of the Kirk-of-Field and Bristo, with their round arches flanked by strong towers, where the brass culverins scowled through deep embrasures, and the heads of Rizzio’s minor murderers grinned on iron spikes.

The humble dwelling in which Mary’s incaution and the conspirators’ cunning had lodged the young king, was a two-storied house; a small corridor, having a room on each side, led to a tower behind, wherein (after the Scottish fashion) a circular stair gave access to the upper story, which contained but two apartments, corresponding with two on the ground floor.

Darnley occupied one; the queen had the chamber below, and beneath it were those vaults of which the conspirators made a use so fatal; on the south lay a spacious garden shaded by many venerable fruit-trees, which had been reared by prebendaries of St. Mary.

It was now the month of February, 1567.

Thaws, and the increasing heat of the sun, had dispelled the snow from moor and mountain side, though a little still lingered on the peaks of the beautiful Pentlands. The atmosphere was teeming with humid vapours, and the ice that had so long bound the loch of the city had been dissipated, and once more the snowy swan and the sable coot floated on its azure bosom. The thatch on the cottage roofs of Lauriston was once again of emerald green, and the tufted grass began to droop, where for the past winter the icicle had hung.

Each morning, as he rose above Arthur’s Seat, the sun shone more merrily on the barred windows of the close chamber where

the sick king lay; and he heard the voices of the mavis and merle, as they sang on the dewy trees of the ancient orchard. A showery Candlemas-tide had come and gone, unmarked by ceremony or prayer, but old people congratulated each other on the prospect of a beautiful spring, as they repeated the ancient saw—

“Gif Candlemass is fair and clear,
We’ll hae twa winters in the year;”

and merrily the hoodie-crow cawed in the blue sky, and the sparrow twittered on the budding edges, while the ploughman whistled on the rigs of Lauriston and St. Leonard, and urged through the teeming earth their old Scottish ploughs, that were drawn by four oxen, and had but one stilt, like those described by Virgil in his first Georgic.

Darnley was slowly recovering, and the young queen, animated more by pity than affection, still attended him with an assiduity that was no less remarkable than praiseworthy. One of his pages slept constantly in his chamber, and was ever at his call by day and by night; while Mary, when not attending the council at Holyrood, with a few attendants occupied the rooms below. Many of the nobles came to the house daily, and Bothwell among them, making dutiful inquiries concerning the progress of the king’s illness rather than his health; for many of them hoped he yet would die, and so save them from the guilty deed designed.

It was the evening of the tenth of February, and every part of the plan for the accomplishment of the king’s destruction was in progress: an opportunity alone was waited.

In the antechamber of his apartment, a little room, hung with some of that rich arras which Mary had brought with her from France, she was seated with the young prince upon her knee—then a flaxen-haired and hazel-eyed infant of eight months. Mary was paler than usual; for many a night-watch by Darnley’s fever couch had injured her health, and increased that pain of which she so frequently complained, in her side. The prince’s nurse or governess, Annabella of Tullibardine, the venerable Countess of Mar, attired in a great tub fardingale of black brocaded satin, and a towering linen coif of Queen Margaret’s days, leaned on the back of Mary’s chair, toying with the infant, and making it crow and smile.

Bolton, as lieutenant of the archers, stood in the recess of a

window at the lower end of the room, accoutred in half armour, and having his helmet lying near him ; and Bothwell, clad in black velvet, magnificently embroidered with Venetian gold, his sword and waistbelt, his poniard and bonnet blazing with jewels, as his blue velvet mantle did with spangles, stood in another, clanking his gold spurs, and pointing his well-perfumed and pomatumed moustaches ; for, however deep and deadly his projects, he now never omitted an opportunity of appearing to the best advantage in Mary's presence ; and on this evening nothing could surpass the splendour of his aspect and the gallantry of his air.

How little could Mary conceive the guilty hopes then animating his proud heart, and the dark purposes concealed under an exterior so prepossessing.

"My Lady Mar!" said she, stopping suddenly in her play with the infant, on whom she was pouring all that maternal tenderness, which was the stronger because there was no other object with whom to share her love ; "how goeth the time ? Is it the hour at which Picaudet the leech desired his grace to receive the p'tisan?"

"I have no horologue," replied the aged Countess. "Beside, I deem them the work of sorcerers ; but Sir John Hepburn can see the dial-stone at the corner there. What sayeth the sun?"

"'Tis thrice by the dial, noble lady," replied the archer, peering through the grated casement.

"*Jesu !*" exclaimed the Queen ; "*comme le temps passe !* 'Tis time I were busking me for Sebastian's bridal. Lord Bothwell—thou knowest the Chevalier Sebastian ? He is one of my foreign musieians, who is to be wedded to-night at Holyrood, where, in the old fashion, I have promised to put the bride to bed. *Ma foi !* but 'tis droll !"

"Indced!" responded the Earl, scarcely knowing what he said.

"What ! hast thou not heard that I am to give a ball in consequence, despite Knox and his rebellious sermons ? Did not the master of the household, Sir Gilbert Balfour, invite thee?"

"True, madam ; but I have to keep a tryst with the Knight of Ormiston, which will—will preclude, as thou—pardon me, I mean *your* Majesty, will perceive—." The Earl paused ; he was seriously embarrassed, and his face became deadly pale ; but he was relieved on the arras covering the door of Darnley's chamber

being softly raised, and a slight but handsome page—a pale and delicate boy—richly attired in a jaquette of carnation velvet, laced and buttoned with gold, with his well-rounded legs encased in white silk hosen—appeared, and said in a low and hurried voice—

“Madam—his majesty is asking for the ptisan ordered by your physician, Martin de Picauet.”

“It will be ready in a minute,” said the stately old noblewoman, as she peered with her keen eyes into a silver pot, which had been simmering on the warm hearthstone, and contained one of those medicinal decoctions for which the dames of other days were so famous—a notable ptisan, made of barley boiled with raisins, liquorice, and other ingredients, which she carefully stirred *widdershins*; that is, the reverse of the sun’s course, otherwise its whole power, virtue, and efficacy would have been lost. “Lord Bothwell,” said she, “wilt thou favour me so far as to see that his grace takes the whole of this, my medicated draught?”

“I assure you, noble madam, that my good friend Bolton is much more of a nurse, and hath more of a lady’s nature, than I,” replied the Earl, who found it impossible, at one and the same time, to love Mary and sympathise with her husband, whom he sincerely wished to take his speedy departure to a better world. Mary gave him one keen, reproachful glance; but Hepburn, who was anxious to behold, but with no compassionate eye, the man whom he had doomed to destruction—for the memory of the night-scene in the garden of Holyrood still rankled in his memory—that night, since when he had never seen his loved and lost Mariette, for the profligate king had spirited her away. Now the full glow of hatred rose darkly in his haughty and resentful heart; so, taking, from the countess the old peg-tankard containing the ptisan, he raised the arras and entered the chamber of Darnley; but almost at the same moment the page and the anxious old countess followed.

Bothwell, who had been relieved by the presence of others, now trembled; for the continual restraint he imposed upon his ardour, made him feel how dangerous was the predicament in which he stood. Should he not shun this dark temptation, that was gradually verging him, like a rudderless ship, on the shoals of destruction? Should he not fly the witcheries of Mary, and the charm of her presence, while he yet had the power? No!

For the hatred he cherished against Darnley, the secret favour which he fondly imagined was borne him in Mary's heart, his own unbounded ambition and haughty pride, all forbade such a measure.

His better angel wept, and Bothwell stayed !

He drew nearer the Queen.

There, in the full glory of the setting sun, in the curtained recess of that tall pointed window, sat the young and royal mother, in all the bloom of four-and-twenty, and the charms of her innocence and beauty. The little prince (he who, in future times, would "a twofold ball and treble sceptre carry,") lay in her lap, pulling with his dimpled hands the massive tresses of her bright auburn hair, that, like the softest silk, unbound by his playfulness, rolled over her thick ruff, and pure alabaster neck.

The Earl thought her more beautiful and touching in her maternity, than she seemed when in all her maiden loveliness at the court of the Tournelles. Mary, who felt a little confused on finding herself alone with one to whose secret hopes she was now no stranger, never once raised her dark eyes to the glowing face that she knew full well was bent with ardour upon her ; and, though secure in the innocence of her own heart, she felt that she was in a dangerous vicinity ; and, blushing at the recollection of the garden scene, never once addressed the Earl, who, restrained by etiquette, remained silent and in his place, playing with the gold tassel of his long rapier.

How lovable, how amiable Mary seemed, and how different from her cousin of England, the puissant Elizabeth ; in her cold and stale virginity—her old maiden folly, and youthful frippery ; her dancing at seventy years of age before the ambassadors of Scotland and Spain, to show how *very* young she was !

As the Earl gazed upon Mary, love filled his mind with the most glittering illusions, and cast a halo round her that dazzled him. He almost fancied himself the husband of the beautiful being before him, and the father of the little cherub on her knee ; a glow, to which his heart had yet been a stranger, swelled up within it, as the brief hallucination became more complete. His passing flame for Anna and his Countess—his schemes of power and grandeur—were all forgotten and merged in the joy that filled his bosom. There was something almost pure and holy in it ; and he felt, that were he really what he strove to imagine

himself, he would become an altered man—he could for evermore be good, and just, and saintly.

The sound of a shrill silver whistle (there were then no hand-bells) from the next room where Darnley lay sick, dispelled the illusion; the Queen hurriedly placed her babe in its cradle of carved oak, and hastened away, with buoyancy in her step, and anxiety in her eye.

Dark as midnight was the expression that loured on Bothwell's brow, when thus brought suddenly back to the world of realities, and, like a flood, the stern compact made under that baleful yew at Whittinghame—that doubly attested bond of blood—the danger to be dared and the deed to be done, all rushed upon his memory, and he smote his pale forehead, as with confusion and agony he staggered under the very gush of his own dreadful thoughts.

But there was no time to be lost.

The sun was verging towards the Pentlands' western peaks. He had to meet his friends at the lodging of the laird of Ormiston in the High Street, for much had yet to be done ere

He thrust away the thought, and, bowing to the Countess of Mar, drew his mantle about him and rushed away.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE KING'S PAGE.

THE chamber was dark, for its grated windows faced the east, and the time was evening; the curtains were half drawn, to exclude the light, which was already partly secluded by a great gloomy bastle-house of the town rampart. The walls of the room were paneled, and, like the ceiling, painted with a variety of grotesque designs, amid which, as usual, the thistle and fleur-de-lys bore conspicuous places; but, according to the ancient and primitive mode, the floor was strewn with green rushes, freshly pulled from the margin of the neighbouring lake.*

The young king was sleeping heavily and uneasily.

Raised upon a dais of steps, his bed was ancient and massive;

* Hentzner, in his *Itinerary*, writing of Queen Elizabeth's chamber at Greenwich, says, "the floor, after the English mode, was strewed with *hay*," evidently meaning rushes.—See *Brand*.

the posts, of walnut-tree, were covered with quaint designs, and carved into four tall figures, having the heads of men, with eagles' wings and lions' bodies; rising from pedestals, they seemed like dusky demons upholding the canopy of a tomb; for the festoons of the bed were of crimson velvet, flowered by the fair hands of Mary and her ladies; the seats of the high-backed chairs were all of the same costly materials.

Sharpened and attenuated by disease, Darnley's features glimmered in the subdued light, like those of a rigid corpse and the myriad pustules incident to the hideous ailment under which he suffered, were apparent to the louring eye of Bolton who, remembering that night in the garden of Holyrood, gazed upon him with sensations akin to those of a tigress robbed of her cubs; and the age was not one when men sat placidly under a sense of wrong, or repressed their impulses either of good or evil.

He gave the goblet to the page, whose hand trembled, and whose eye was averted as he received it; then, creeping softly to the side of the slumberer, he placed an arm affectionately under his head, raised it, awoke him, and placed the ptisan to his parched lips, and thirstily Darnley drank of the grateful beverage.

At that moment a ray of sunset, reflected from the wall of the adjacent bastle-house, lit up the chamber, and the hollow recess of that great bed where the kingly sufferer lay; and through the disguise of a page's jaquette and ruff, the trunk hosen and shorn hair, Bolton recognised Mariette Hubert—his lost, his fallen Mariette, with her arm round Darnley's head, that head pressed against her breast; and this was under his own eyes.

He gave an involuntary start—an exclamation rose to his lips but died there; and all he had lately heard of this false page's tenderness and assiduity, flashed like fire upon his memory, and his hand wandered to the hilt of his dagger, for grimly the thoughts of assassination and revenge floated before him.

Darnley kissed her hand as he sank back exhausted; thus showing that he was aware of her sex, and a blindness seemed to fall upon the eyes of Bolton, for he had loved that French coquette with all the depth and truth of a brave and romantic heart; but the sight of all this tenderness lavished on a rival and the consciousness that Mariette, whom he would have raised to the rank of a Scottish baron's wife, was content to be the mistress of this profligate king, entered like ice into his heart

There was a terrible expression in his face, when Mariette gave him one furtive glance of her timid eyes, and saw that she was discovered.

Fascinated and terrified by the sad and tender, yet serpent-like gaze of her former lover, she dared not remove her eyes; but sank down on the dais of the bed, and clasping her hands, said in a low voice—

“Ah, monsieur! forgive me? If ever thou didst love, in pity now forgive me! Thou knowest not what I have endured since I wronged thee—and how I have endeavoured to atone for it—”

“By such a scene as this?” replied Bolton, with a bitter smile; “but enough! I hope his majesty hath enjoyed his draught of the ptisan; for I doubt mickle if my Lady Mar will make such another browst—for *him* at least.”

“Dost thou think he will die?” asked Mariette, breathlessly.

“Not of the fever!” replied Bolton, smiling grimly. “But be true to thy charge, Mademoiselle Hubert—anon I will be with thee.”

“Thou—when?” asked Mariette, gathering courage from his stoical coldness of manner.

“*To-night!*” he replied, with a smile that terrified her, as he took the ptisan cup from her passive hand, and left the chamber by a door opposite to that by which he had entered.

There was an agony in his heart that impelled him to seek solitude. Descending the turnpike stair by three steps at a time, and issuing into the fields, he traversed the path that led under the city walls towards the Porte of St. Mary's Wynd.

The shadows of evening deepened into those of night, and the hour approached when Mary was to set forth to attend the espousal of her favourite damsel, Margaret Corewood, to Sebastian the musician; which ceremony, with her usual love of gaiety and society, she resolved to celebrate by a ball, or, as it was then named, a hall.

A strong instance of Mary's returning love for her husband, was this night evinced by her leaving the hall at nine o'clock, and hurrying back to the lonely house of the Kirk-of-Field, with a few attendants, to visit him once more before the dancing began.

Whether the marriage of Margaret Corewood had brought back the memory of their own, in all its first freshness, in Mary ardent mind, or that joy to behold the changed manner and subdued aspect of her haughty and profligate husband, had rekindled her early love for him, is unknown; but this last interview between them was marked by unusual tenderness.

She kissed him repeatedly, soothed him by her winning and playful manner—and, placing a valuable ring upon his hand, blessed him with fervour; and then, with a light heart and happy spirit, hurried away to finish the festivities at Holyrood and “put the bride to bed.”

The malevolent Buchanan, who, forgetful of many a favour was Mary’s bitterest enemy, and but for whose elegant Latin the vulgar Edinburgh gossip of 1567 would never have reached us, states, that during this interview the queen was aware that the conspirators were placing powder in the chambers below. But the depositions taken in the presence of the Lords of the Secret Council evince the contrary; and Camden assures us, that Buchanan, on his death-bed, deplored with tears the falsehood he had handed down to posterity.

It is remarkable that a presentiment of his approaching fate haunted the mind of the young king, who frequently said that he knew he was to be slain. He became sad and thoughtful and, chanting the 55th Psalm, fell asleep with his head on the shoulder of Mariette Hubert.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

IN THREE HOURS IT WILL BE TIME.

EVENING drew on, while buried in deep thought, the Earl walked from the house of the Kirk-of-Field, without knowing whence his steps led, until he found himself on the hill of St. Leonard, where the ruined chapel, dedicated to that holy hermit, overlooked the deep and grassy vale that lay between it and the imposing crags of Salisbury, whose brows of rugged basalt towered up against the blue sky in rigid outline.

All around these ruins was desolate and bare; and, save a few sheep browsing on the sprouting herbage, there was no loving thing near him. Bothwell could hear the pulses of his

heart. He leant against the shaft of Umfraville's cross—a time-worn relic of antiquity, that in those days stood on the pathway near the chapel; and folding his arms in his mantle, endeavoured to compose and arrange the tumult of his thoughts.

The spring evening was serene, and the scenery beautiful. Afar off, amid a blaze of saffron, the sun's flaming circle seemed to rest on the western flank of the magnificent Pentland chain; and each mountain came forward in strong warm light, while the valleys between were veiled in shadow.

The sound of a distant bell fell on the ear of the Earl.

“Seven o'clock,” said he; “*in three hours it will be time!*”

Sheltered by towering hills, and overhung by the aspiring city, he saw the old monastic palace, sleeping, as it were, at the bottom of a dell, all seemed so still around it; and far beyond lay the dark blue German sea, dotted with the sails of Flemish crayers and galleys of Rochelle; but its bosom grew darker as the daylight died away behind the distant hills.

The shadows grew longer and darker, and obscurity veiled the valley where the palace lay.

Full upon Edina's castled rock and all her lofty hills, fell the last light of the western sun, from between glowing bars of golden cloud; and their giant shadows, broad, vast, and dewy, were thrown to the eastward, becoming as the sun sunk, longer and longer, till they reached the ocean, that rolled upon the almost desert shore of the Figgate muir. The gradual fading of the light amid the mountain solitude that overhung the city, soothed and saddened the Earl, for the spot was wild and lonely; the black eagle and the osprey then built their nests in the craigs of Salisbury; and the red fox and the dun fuimart reared their cubs undisturbed in the valley below.

He felt an agitation and a compunction hitherto unknown, in his bosom; and, as the day faded, he watched its decline with the anxiety of a man who was to die at nightfall.

The shadows ascended from the low places to the higher, rising slowly, surely, broadly, like a transparent tide, on the trunks of the lofty oaks that shaded the city muir, on the slopes of Arthur's Seat and Samson's stony ribs, on St. Giles's diademed tower, and the castle's bannered keep—up, up the Pentlands' sides it crept slowly and silently, the coming night (that night which was never to be forgotten by him), till the last

gleam of the west died away on the heath-clad peak of Torduff, the loftiest of that magnificent chain of mountains.

It was gone! the whole hills were sunk in sombre shadow; the evening star began to twinkle above the ruined spire of St. Mary's Kirk, and night and silence stole upon the world together.

"Would this night were over!" muttered the Earl, passing his hand across his clammy brow. "Would to God it were!—God! how dare I to name *him*?"

He gave one long, keen glance at the distant house of the Kirk-of-Field, and saw its lofty outline, with crowstepped roofs and turnpike tower, standing in dark relief between him and the blushing west; a light was beginning to twinkle in one of the apartments.

It was from that where Darnley lay.

Already, with remorse, Bothwell thought of poor Konrad of Saltzberg; for aware that, in its first fury, the popular vengeance would require some victim to glut its outpouring, Ormiston—ever cool, calculating, and ruthless—had recommended, as we have stated, that the friendless foreigner should be involved in that night's deed of darkness; and, rendered almost blindly selfish, in the magnitude of the risk about to be incurred by himself and so many great nobles, he had assented to this additional act of cruelty.

"Alms, noble Earl, for God and our blessed Lady's sake!" said a voice near the ruined cross. Bothwell started and turned, and encountered the reverend figure of Sir James Tarbet, leaning on a long staff; and stung to the soul by the momentary contemplation of this old man's poverty and humility, when contrasted with his own pride and guilt, he turned abruptly away.

"Thou hast not heeded me, Lord Earl," said the old man; "but may they whose names I implored, bless thee not the less."

Touched by this resignation, he approached the poor priest with averted eyes.

"Alms, sir! for the sake of the soul of old Earl Adam of Bothwell; had *he* been alive, I had not needed to crave them to-day. He fell by my side at Flodden; and this poor hand was raised to save him from the English billmen."

Bothwell hurriedly placed his purse in the withered fingers

of the priest ; and thus, with the greatest of all human virtues in his hand, and the blackest of all human crimes in his heart, he drew his bonnet over his eyes, and at a rapid pace, as if he would leave his own fierce ambition and desperate thoughts behind him, began to descend the hill of St. Leonard, towards the palace of Holyrood, where a line of brilliantly illuminated windows recalled to his memory the royal ball given in honour of the nuptials of Sebastian.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE OLD TOWER OF HOLYROOD.

ABOVE the northern shoulder of Arthur's seat, the moon rose red and fiery. Slowly its lurid circle cleared the ridge of the darkened mountain, and ascended into the grey sky, through which the clouds were hurrying, like banners of black crape.

Konrad watched it from a slit in the prison wall where he was confined ; and even that slit, though scarcely four inches broad, was secured by a cross bar of iron ; and the pale moonlight and the cold wind played on his face together, as they penetrated his strong chamber in the Albany tower, and served but to make it seem more comfortless and desolate.

He was alone now ; for Father Tarbet had been released, and "expelled the walls of the city, with all his idolatrous crosses and pictures."

He and Konrad had parted in sorrow, and now every night he missed the soothing prayers and kind consolations of the good old priest ; and imagined, with pity and indignation, the insults to which he was certain of being exposed, when wandering in a Reformed and hostile land, without a shelter for his venerable head.

From many of the palace windows, bright flakes of light fell on the green holly-hedges and dewy grass of the royal gardens, and on the dusky buttresses and pointed windows of the chapel, throwing their steady radiance on the grim outline of James V.'s tower, and the aged sycamore that shaded its massive wall. A faint strain of music stole upon the soft night wind, and then died away.

Again it came, and the chapel's hollow aisles replied—again

and again, through the opened casements, burst in full chorus the music of the queen's Italian singers, performing Sebastian's bridal hymn.

The pulses of Konrad's enthusiastic heart rose and fell with the music; for he was borne away from himself on the stream of harmony that swept past him. The air resembled one that he had frequently heard Anna sing, and all her memory came rushing on his mind. Bowing his face upon his hands, he pressed his flushed brow against the rusty bars, and groaned aloud.

At that moment some one, who had entered his prison unheard, touched him on the shoulder. He started from his reverie, to be confronted by the same dark and colossal figure, that met his gaze on the night when he fell from the Terrace of Bergen into the Fiord below. Tall, dusky, and muffled in a mantle, he wore a black mask, partially concealing his face; but his bright, fierce eyes shone through it like red stars.

"Groaning—eh! art thou sick?" he asked.

"Yes—of life!"

"Faith! I thought it was the mulligrubs. God-den to thee, Konrad of Saltzberg—whilk I believe is thy title—'tis long since we have spoken; yet, methinks, thou mayest still remember me."

"I do, for mine enemy!" replied Konrad, whose indignation rose at the voice.

"Cock and pie! say not that," replied Ormiston; "for may the great devil spit me, if I owe thee any ill-will, or mean thee aught like mischief!"

"Then for what end dost thou seek me now? I have endured here exceeding misery. Who is there that has known sorrow without some relief—despair without hope—who, but I? An irresistible current of misfortunes has hurried me on, and—I am here—*here*, where I am almost forgetting the use of my limbs, while life is in its bloom; yea, and the very tone of my own voice. What have I done among ye, sirs, in this land of Scotland, to be treated thus?"

"By Jove! I can scarcely tell; but there are those about Holyrood who say that keeping thee caged up here, is only feeding what ought to be hanged to feed the corbies; yet, if thou wouldest attain that liberty for which thou longest, do as I bid thee, and thou shalt escape to thy beloved Norway—God

amend it! for the flavour of its sawdust bannocks and sour ale are yet fresh in my memory."

"Thou hast some selfish end of thine own to serve in this."

"By cock and pie! Sir Konrad, thou measurest thy friends by a low standard, especially such a long-limbed one as I. Thou canst not well be worse. Stay here, and thou wilt assuredly be hanged, whenever honest Gilbert Balfour, the Master of the Household, grows tired of feeding thee; follow me, and thou mayest escape."

"Thou sayest true; I cannot be worse; lead on—I follow thee!"

Ormiston gave him a mantle, unclasped the massive fetterlocks that secured his stiffened ankles, and led him down the narrow stair of the tower into the outer court of Holyrood, where Konrad almost tottered and fell, on finding himself fully exposed to the keen night wind of February; but black Ormiston, with rough kindness, forced him to take a draught from a hunting-flask that hung at his girdle, and then gave him a sword, saying—

"If we are assailed, thou must stand by me!"

"To the death!" replied Konrad, as he grasped the sword, and felt his spirit rise with his old energy and ardour on finding himself once again armed, fetterless, and free. His sinews became strong; his bosom fired; his heart danced with joy; and, little dreaming of the treachery designed him, or the trap into which he was falling, he shook the strong hand of the gigantic Ormiston in token of confidence and thankfulness.

The greater part of the vast and irregular façade of Holyrood was buried in darkness; the buildings were of various heights and ages, the highest portion being that which now forms the north wing; and heavily its great round towers and corbelled battlements loomed against the murky sky.

The moon was now veiled by a cloud; scarcely a star was visible; and the chill wind whistled drearily in the empty courts, and through the low gothic cloisters built by St. David I. for the monks of the Holy Cross.

Passing James V.'s tower, Ormiston led Konrad to the southern doorway of the royal garden, and thereon he knocked thrice with the pommel of his long, heavy sword.

"Who is without there?" asked a voice.

"One who would *keep tryst!*" replied Ormiston, using Bothwell's family motto—the parole agreed upon.

The gate was immediately opened, and six or seven men, well muffled in dark mantles, and wearing swords and black velvet masks, came forth cautiously, one at a time. As they stepped into the palace-yard, the clank of steel made it apparent to Konrad that they were all well armed; and in their general bearing and aspect there was no mistaking them for anything else than what they were—conspirators; and, though he knew them not, many of them were no other than the very men who had met beneath that baneful yew-tree at the Castle of Whittinghame.

“’Tis high time we were fairly set forth!” said one, in whom, by his short stature and long beard, Ormiston recognised the Earl of Morton.

“True,” added his vassal, the Laird of Whittinghame; “for the city horologue has struck ten, and by that hour the Queen was to leave for Sebastian’s ball.”

“Bothwell, thou hast wisely changed all thine outward trumpery,” said Ormiston.

“Behold,” replied the Earl, displaying a coarse canvass gaberdine above a coat-of-mail, for which he had exchanged his ball costume, ‘a pair of black velvet hose, trimit with silver, and ane doublet of satin,’ as we are minutely informed by the *Depositiones in Præsentia Dominorum Secreti Concilii*.

He carried in his hand a maul, to beat down doors or other obstructions.

The other conspirators, John of Bolton, Hob Ormiston of that ilk, Hay of Tallo, Hume of Spott, and John Binney, a vassal of Whittinghame, were all well armed with coats-of-mail and pyne-doublets. At the palace porch, a gothic edifice, flanked on one side by a round tower, on the other by a projecting turret, they were met by French Paris, leading a sumpter-horse, laden with leathern mails. These contained powder, taken by the Earl from the royal store in the Castle of Dunbar, of which he was governor.

Konrad imagined correctly that some of the voices of his strange companions were not unfamiliar to his ear, but they conversed in low whispers; and feeling no way very comfortable in the company of men whose aspect, in armour and disguise, revealed that they were bent on some mission of darkness and danger, he thought only of escape. But, as if this very thought was divined, Black Ormiston stuck to his skirts like a burr;

and, as they passed through the long dark arch of the portal, he whispered hoarsely—

“Attempt not to escape; for I have here a dagger that shoots a three-ounce ball, and I will not be slow in using it!”

Konrad, whose spirit could ill brook this, would have made some suitable rejoinder; but at this moment two archers of the guard challenged,

“Who are there?”

“Friends,” replied the Earl of Morton.

“What friends?”

“My Lord of Bothwell’s friends,” and the whole party issued into the Canongate.*

Where revealed by the mask, which came only down to his dark moustaches, Bothwell’s face was white as marble; and, as they passed the Mint, he looked up at the dark windows of David Rizzio’s empty mansion, which stood at the corner of the Horse Wynd.

“He was slain just about this time last year,” said the Earl.

“And this night will be avenged,” replied Ormiston, as if to apologise for the purpose which had brought them together.

At the back of the south garden they were again challenged by two archers with bent bows, and, replying in the same unguarded manner, passed on.

They ascended the dark and silent Canongate, where not a sound was heard save their own footfalls, and the dull tramp of the felt-shod sumpter-horse that bore the powder-mails; and, passing the lofty barrier that divided the burghs by its strong round towers and double arch, they descended with silence and rapidity the broad and spacious wynd of the Blackfriars, and reached the foot unseen.

Here, we are told, they paused a moment, while Bolton purchased a “candell frae Geordie Burnis wife in the Cowgate;” and at that time a blaze of light, flashing along the narrow street, on the octagon turrets of that picturesque old house, where whilome dwelt the great Cardinal of St. Stephen, made them shrink under its shadow with some dismay; for lo! the unconscious Queen, attended by three Earls (two of whom were also conspirators) Argyle, Huntly, and Cassilis, with her sister, the Countess Jane, and other ladies, the whole escorted by Sir

* Such really appears to have been the incautious answer given to the various sentinels.—*Depositiones I. P. D.*

Arthur Erskine's archers, passed down the opposite wynd, *en route* for the palace. She was on foot ; six soldiers of the guard bore a blue silk canopy over her head, and twelve others carried torches.

She was returning to Holyrood, from her hurried visit to that very place for which all these muffled men were bound—the lonely house of the Kirk-of-Field !

On her beautiful face and smart hood, the black velvet of which contrasted so well with her snowy brow, fell the full glare of the streaming torches, imparting to her usually pale cheek a tinge of red, and to her auburn hair the hue of gold. Mary Erskine, sister to the captain of the archers, bore her train, and the long stomacher from which it fell was sparkling with jewels ; for she was arrayed in all the lavish richness of the time.

Intoxicated by her beauty, every scruple that the impressive gloom of the night, and the cooler reflections of the last few hours, had raised in the Earl's breast, died away ; and, with eyes that beamed with the most eager and impassioned love, he saw her pass down the street, and disappear.

Her light heart was full of visions of anticipated gaiety ; and, already revelling amid the brilliance, the music, and the dancers at Sebastian's ball, how little could she anticipate what was about to ensue !

Passing through Todrick's Wynd, and the spacious gardens of the monks of St. Dominic (where now the Infirmary stands), they issued from a little postern in the city wall (the keys of which Bothwell had secured), and found themselves under the shadow of *the House* of the Kirk, which was buried in obscurity and darkness, save where one solitary ray of faint light streamed into the desolate garden from the apartment where the sick king lay.

Every eye was fixed upon it.

All around was silent as the grave ; there was nothing stirring save the branches of the leafless orchard, which creaked mournfully in the rising wind, and the tufts of long reedy grass that waved in the rough masonry of the dark old Flodden wall.

At times, the red rays of the moon shot forth tremulously between the flying vapour upon that dreary spot and the high sepulchral dwelling, throwing light and shadow fitfully upon its dark discoloured walls.

The conspirators drew close together.

They were all pale as death ; but their masks concealed the trepidation that would, nevertheless, have been visible in every face, as their voices betrayed it to be in every heart.

"Hist ! dost thou not hear groans ?" whispered Bothwell, plucking Black Ormiston by the cloak.

"Groans !" reiterated the startled conspirator. "No—"

"By Heaven ! I even heard a low wailing cry upon the wind."

"Go to ! if thou hearest this before, what wilt thou hear *after* ?"

* * * * *

It is very remarkable that the Earl of Moray (who is not said to have had any share in this conspiracy) on the morning of that day should have left Holyrood suddenly, to visit his Countess, who, he said, was seriously ill at St. Andrews ; and it is still more remarkable that, when riding along the coast of Fife, attended by only one confidential retainer, he should—as Bishop Lesly informs us—burst out with these ominous words—

"This night, ere morning, the Lord Darnley shall lose his life !"

CHAPTER L.

THE KIRK-OF-FIELD.

THERE was not a sound heard in the mansion, which, at that moment, had no other occupants than the doomed prince, his two pages, (or chamber-cheilds as the Scots name them,) and five other attendants,—William Taylor, Thomas Neilson, Simpson, Edwards, and a boy. These occupied apartments at the extremity of the house, but on the same floor with the king. All the other attendants had absconded, to partake of the festivities at Holyrood, or had gone there in the Queen's retinue.

"French Paris—Nicholas Hubert," said Bothwell in a husky voice, "the keys !"

Hubert produced them from beneath his mantle. They were a set of false keys which had been made from waxen impressions of the originals. The door was softly opened, and the conspirators entered the lower ambulatory, on each side of which lay a vaulted chamber.

Bolton thought of Hubert's sister, and his heart grew sick ; for the brother knew not that his sister was at that time above them, in the chamber of Darnley.

"Come, Master Konrad," said Ormiston, tapping him on the shoulder; "if we are to be friends, assist us, and make thyself useful; for we have little time to spare."

Thus urged, Konrad, though still in profound ignorance as to the object of his companions, and the part he was acting, assisted Ormiston and French Paris to unload the sumpter-horse, and to drag the heavy mails within doors. These he supposed to contain plunder, and then the whole mystery appeared unravelled. His companions were robbers, and the solitary house, about and within which they moved so stealthily, was their haunt and hiding-place. With affected good-will he assisted to convey the mails into the vaults, where, some hours before, Hubert had deposited a large quantity of powder, particularly under the corner or ground stones of the edifice.

While they were thus employed, and while the ex-Lord Chancellor and Whittinghame kept watch, the Earl and John of Bolton ascended softly to the corridor of the upper story, where, by the dim light of a small iron cresset that hung from the pointed ceiling, they saw Andro Macaige, one of the king's pages, lying muffled in his mantle, and fast asleep on a bench.

"Confusion!" said the Earl fiercely; "this reptile must be destroyed, and I have lost my poniard!"

"Must both the pages die?" asked his companion, in a hollow tone.

"Thou shalt soon see!" replied the Earl, who endeavoured, by imitating Ormiston's careless and ruffian manner, to veil from his friends, and from himself, the horror that was gradually paralysing his heart.

They passed the sleeping page unheard, as the floor was freshly laid with rushes, and entered the chamber of the young king—that dimly-lighted chamber of sickness and suffering; where the innumerable grotesque designs of some old prebend of St. Mary, seemed multiplied to a myriad gibbering faces, as the faint and flickering radiance of the night lamp played upon them. The great bed looked like a dark sarcophagus, canopied by a sable pall; and the king's long figure, covered by a white satin coverlet, resembled the effigy of a dead man; and certainly the pale sharp outline of his sleeping face, in no way tended to dispel the dreamy illusion.

Bothwell's fascinated gaze was riveted on him, but Bolton's turned to *the page*, who was half seated and half reclined on the

low bed, and, though fast asleep, lay against the sick king's pillow, with an arm clasping his head.

They seemed to have fallen asleep thus.

The thick dark hair of Mariette fell in disorder about her shoulders; her cheeks were pale and blanched, and blistered by weeping; her long and silky eyelashes were wet and matted with tears; and there was more of despondency than affection in the air with which she drooped beside the king. Her weariness of weeping and sorrow had evidently given way to slumber.

Rage and jealousy swelled the heart of Bolton. He panted rather than breathed; and though his long-desired hour of vengeance on them both had come, he too was paralysed, trembling, and irresolute. The Earl gave him a glance of uncertainty; but Bolton saw only Mariette. Conscience whispered "to pause," while there was yet time; but *the bond* had been signed, the stake laid, and to waver was to die!

For a moment a blindness fell upon his eyes, and a sickness on his heart; and the Earl said to Hepburn in a hollow accent—

"Thy poniard—thy poniard! Thou hast it! The king, the king! and I will grasp this boy."

At that moment Mariette started, awoke, and uttered a shrill cry of terror on perceiving two armed men with their faces masked.

The king turned uneasily in bed; and, filled with desperation by the imminence of the danger, and the necessity for immediate action, Bothwell approached the couch. But either Darnley had been awake (and watching them for some time,) or instantly became so, and with all his senses about him; for like lightning he sprang from bed—his long illness and attenuation making his lofty stature appear more colossal; he snatched a sword, and clad only in his shirt and pelisse, rushed upon the intruders. On this, a frenzy seemed to take possession of both conspirators.

Parrying a sword thrust with his mailed arm, Bothwell threw himself upon the weak and powerless Darnley, and struck him down by a blow of the maul he carried.

The wretched king uttered a piercing cry; another and another succeeded, and Bothwell, animated by all the momentary fury of a destroyer, stuffed a handkerchief violently into his mouth, and at that moment he became insensible.

Meanwhile, Bolton, trembling with apprehension, jealousy, horror, and (shall we say it ?) love, clasped Mariette in his arms, and endeavoured to stifle her cries ; but she uttered shriek upon shriek, till maddened by fear and excitement, all the despair of the lover became changed to hatred and clamorous alarm. A spirit of destruction possessed his soul ; his nerves seemed turned to iron, his eyes to fire.

He became blind—mad !

He grasped her by the neck—(that delicate and adorable neck, which it had once been a rapture to kiss, while he toyed with the dark ringlets that shaded it)—and as his nervous grasp tightened, her eyeballs protruded, her arms sank powerless, and her form became convulsed.

She gave him one terrible glance that showed she recognised him, and made one desperate effort to release herself, and to embrace him.

“O Jesu Maria ! spare me, dearest Hepburn—spare me ! I love thee still—I do—I do ! Kill me not—destroy me not thus—with all my sins ! Man—devil—spare me ! God—God !”

She writhed herself from his hands, and sank upon the floor, where, vibrating between time and eternity, she lay motionless and still. Hepburn’s senses were gone—yet he could perceive close by him the convulsed form of the king, with Bothwell’s handkerchief in his throat. He was dead.

The terrible deed was done ! They sprang away, stumbling over the body of Macaige the page, whom Hay of Tallo had slain in the corridor ; and, descending the stairs almost at one bound, came panting and breathless to the side of the cool and deliberate Morton, who, with his sword drawn, stood near Ormiston, and superintended the laying of a train to the powder in the vaults. Then, by the light of the red-orbed moon, that streamed full upon them, did the startled Konrad perceive that Bothwell and Bolton, whose masks were awry, appeared stunned and bewildered. The eyes of the Earl were glazed and haggard ; his hands were clenched, and his brow knit with horrible thoughts ; his companion was like a spectre ; his eyes rolled fearfully, and his hair seemed stiffened and erect.

Konrad recognised them both, and immediately became aware that some deed of darkness had been perpetrated.

“Thou hast done well !” said Ormiston, surveying them grimly.

"*Well!*" reiterated the Earl, in a sepulchral voice, as, overcome and exhausted by the sudden revulsion of his terrible thoughts, he leaned against the doorway. "*Well!* saidst thou? Oh, Hob Ormiston! my very soul seemed at my finger-points when I grasped him. My God! what am I saying? I was intoxicated—delirious! Cain—Cain!"

"Ah, Mariette!" groaned the repentant Bolton; "thy dying cry, and the last glare of thy despairing eyes, will haunt me to my grave!"

"Cock and pie!" cried Ormiston, with astonishment and exasperation; "have we here two bearded men, or two schulebairns blubbering over their Latinities? May a thousand yelling fiends hurl ye both to hell!" he added savagely.

"Away! disperse—while I fire the train. The match—the hunt! Hither, Paris—Hubert—thou French villain! quick!"

"Separate!" said the Earl of Morton; "disperse—I go to Dalkeith on the spur. Away!" and, leaping on the horse that had borne the powder, this noble Earl, who at all times was extremely economical of his own person, galloped away, and disappeared over the brae to the southward.

Bothwell's olive face glowed for a moment, as he blew the slow match and fired the train. Like a fiery serpent, it glowed along the ground, flashed through the open doorway, and down the dark corridor of the house, till it reached the vaulted chamber below that of Darnley, and where the powder lay. Then there was a pause—but for a moment only—for, lo!—

Broad, red, and lurid, on the shadowy night, through all the grated windows of the house of the Kirk-of-Field, there flashed a volume of light—dazzling and blinding light—eclipsing the full-orbed moon and all the sparkling stars—revealing the forms of the shrinking conspirators, and every surrounding object. Full on the massive ramparts of the city, tufted with weeds and blackened by the smoke of years, fell that sudden glow, revealing the strong embrasures that stretched away into far obscurity, the grim bastel-house close by, with its deep-mouthed gunport and peering culverin—on the ivied aisles of Mary's lonely kirk—on the shattered tower of the Dominicans—and displaying even for a gleam the distant woods of Merchiston. The fields quaked—the walls of the mansion shook; and then came a roar, as if the earth was splitting.

The solid masonry rent from copestone to foundation in a

hundred ruddy fissures ; the massive vaults yawned and opened ; the window-gratings were torn asunder like gossamer webs ; and a gigantic column of fire and smoke, dust and stones, ascended into the air, as if vomited from the mouth of a volcano, to descend in ruin and darkness on the earth ; and a vast pile of rubbish was all that remained of the house of St. Mary-in-the-Fields !

“ Ho ! ho ! ” cried Ormiston, with a wild laugh. “ Like a bolt from a bow, there goeth Henry Stuart, Lord of Darnley, Duke of Albany, and King of Scotland ! ”

For a moment Bothwell felt as if he neither lived nor breathed ; but Ormiston hurried him away, while all their appalled comrades dispersed in various directions. Konrad, although the whole affair was an incomprehensible mystery to him, acting by the natural instinct of self-preservation, on finding himself deserted by companions whom he dreaded and abhorred, instead of returning to the city, struck into a narrow horseway that led southward, and hurried with all speed from the scene of this terrible explosion ; for the whole bearing of those who had so suddenly left him to his own reflections, informed him that it would neither be conducive to his safety or honour to be found in a vicinity so dangerous.

Ignorant of the country, and with no other object than to leave the city far behind him, he traversed the rough and winding path, on one side of which lay a vast lake* and the ruins of a convent ; on the other, fields marked in the ancient fashion (when draining was unknown) by high rigs, having between deep *balks* or ditches, where the water lay glistening in the moonlight. Then he entered upon the vast common muir of the burgh, that in the gloom of the night appeared to be bounded only by the distant hills.

From the effect of long confinement he soon became faint and exhausted ; and, though he dared not approach any habitation, there was none within view, for the district seemed strangely desolate and still.

At the verge of the muirland, near where a little runnel meandered between banks overhung by reeds and whin and rushes, there stood a little chapel, dedicated in the olden time to St. John the Baptist, having a crucifix and altar, where the

* The Beugh Loch.—*Mag. Absalom.*

wayfarer might pause to offer up a prayer. There a hermit had once resided ; and the charter of foundation mentions, that he was clothed "in a white garment, having on his breast a portraiture of St. John the Baptist, whose hermit he was called." The chapel had been partly demolished to pave the road ; and even the stone that marked the anechorite's grave, had been torn out for the same purpose. The windows were empty, and the grass grew where the cross had stood on the altar ; but there was no other resting-place, and Konrad entered the little ruin with caution.

A lamp was burning on the altar, but the oratory was quite desolate. The nuns of St. Katherine of Sienna had kept, in other days, a light ever burning on the Baptist's shrine, to which they made yearly pilgrimages ; and one poor old survivor of the scattered sisterhood still tended the lamp with the labour of religious love.

Uttering a prayer to Heaven for protection, overcome by weariness and exhaustion, Konrad laid by his side the sword given him by Ormiston, and, wrapped in the other gift of the same remarkable personage, composed himself to sleep, leaving to the morrow the study and development of his future plans.

How little he knew of the deed in which he had that night been so unwittingly a participator !

Of Darnley's attendants, all were buried among the ruins save Neilson, who was taken alive from amid the debris next day, and William Taylor the page, whose body was found lying beside the king's. They had both been carried through the air, over the lofty ramparts of the city, into the garden of the Blackfriars, where they were found in their night-clothes, within a few yards of each other, without much external injury, save a wound made by the maul on the king's forehead.

Such was the generally received account of this affair, though the recent and able historian of Scotland asserted, that he had seen documents which proved that the young king had been first assassinated, and then carried into the garden ; after which the house was blown up—a useless and dangerous means of causing a more general and immediate alarm.

CHAPTER LI.

THE MIDNIGHT MASS.

"Now, Lord Earl," said Ormiston, as they paused breathlessly near the Pleasance Porte; "which way wendest thou?"

"To Holyrood—to Holyrood!" panted the Earl. "And thou?"

"Faith! to my own lodging. Thou knowest that I bide me at the Netherbow, in the turnpike above Bassandyne, that rascally proclamation printer; and we must enter the city separately." The Earl sighed bitterly. "Cock and pic! what dost thou regret?"

"To-night."

"Then, what dost thou fear?"

"To-morrow."

"By Tantony! thou art a very woman! Remember the bond by which this deed was done—signed by so many noble lords and powerful barons under that yew-tree at Whittinghame. Sighing again! What dost thou dread?"

"*Myself!*" replied the Earl, in whom the reaction of spirit had caused an agony of remorse. "Thce, and the subscribers of that bond, I may avoid—but myself—never!"

"These scruples come somewhat late, my lord!" said Ormiston, scornfully. "Dost thou doubt the faith of me, or of French Paris? Surely thou knowest my zeal!"

"True! but faith and zeal are very different things."

"Shlood! Lord Earl, dost thou doubt mine honour?" said Ormiston, laying his hand on his sword. "Though I owe thee suit and knight's service, nevertheless I am a baron of coat-armour, whose honour brooks no handling. But let us not quarrel, Bothwell!" he added, on seeing that the spirit of his ally was completely prostrated for the time. "Suspicion will never attach to thee; besides, that Norse knave is abroad, with the well-known *cloak and sword* of Darnley, which Hubert stole me from his chamber. These, when he is found again, will turn all the vengeance on him; so let us to bed ere the alarm be given—to bed, I say, in peace; for we have the alliance of ten thousand hearts as brave as ever marched to battle."

"How much more would I prefer the approbation of my own!"

"Out upon thee! I will lose all patience. If thou distrustest Paris, one stroke of a poniard—"

"Peace, Ormiston! thou art a very bravo, and would thus make one more sacrifice to increase our list of crimes."

"Just as a name may be wanted to fill the roll of Scotland's peers, by thy lamentable decapitation, and profitable forfeiture," growled Ormiston. "I know little of statecraft, though I have a bold heart and a strong hand. Come! be once more a man, and leave remorse to children. The crime that passes unpunished, deserves not to be regretted."

"Sophistry!" exclaimed the conscience-struck Earl; "sophistry! Avenging remorse will blast my peace for ever. Now, too bitterly I begin to feel, that joy for ever ends where crime begins!"

They separated.

Blind with confusion, and bewildered by remorse, the Earl reeled like a drunken man, as he hurried down by the back street of the Canongate towards the palace, impatient and dreading to be missed from his apartments, when the alarm should be given.

A burning thirst oppressed him; his tongue felt as if scorched, and his lips were dry and baked. Frightful ideas pressed in crowds through his mind; he often paused and pressed his hands upon his temples; they were like burning coals, and throbbed beneath his trembling fingers. He looked back mentally to the eminence from which he had fallen, and shuddered at the depth and rapidity of his descent. In the storm of remorse and unavailing regret that agitated his soul, the beauty of Mary, and the dreams of ambition it had inspired, were alike forgotten.

He paused at times, and listened; he knew not why. The night was very still, and there came no sound on the passing wind. A pulse was beating in his head. How loud and palpable it was!

There was ever before him the last unearthly glare of those despairing eyes. It was ever in his ears, that expiring wail, sinking into a convulsive sob—ever—ever—turn where he would; if he walked fast—to leave his burning thoughts behind him; if he stood still—that cry and the deathlike visage were ever before him.

"Oh, to be as I have been—as I was but one long hour

ago!" he exclaimed, shaking his clenched hands above his head. "Oh, for the waves of Lethe to wash the past for ever from my memory! Satan—prince of hell—hear me! Hear me, who dares not now to address his God!"

His frightful thirst still continued, until its agony became insupportable; and he looked around to find wherewith to quench it. On the side of St. John's hill, a green and solitary knoll that rose some sixty feet in height on the wayside, a light attracted his attention, and, supposing that it shone from a lonely cottage or small change-house, he approached to procure a draught of anything that could be had for money—any liquid, from water to *lachryma Christi*, to quench the maddening thirst that seemed to consume him.

The light shone from an aperture in the door of a half-ruined barn. Bothwell grasped his sword, and adjusted his mask; but ere he knocked, a voice within, deep and musically solemn, arrested him by saying—

"Confiteor Deo Omnipotenti, beatæ Mariæ semper Virgini, beato Michaeli, archangelo, beato Joanni Baptistæ, Sanctis Apostolis, Petro et Paulo, omnibus Sanctis et tibi, Pater, quia peccavi nimis cogitatione, verbo et operâ. *Meâ culpâ! meâ culpâ! meâ maximâ culpâ!*"

Astonished by these words, which form part of the office of mass, and struck to the very soul in hearing them at such a time, when their application was so painfully direct, he paused a moment. The door was opened by a man in complete armour; but the Earl entered immediately, to behold—what appalled and bewildered him still more.

The rude barn had been hurriedly adapted to the purposes of a chapel. A rough table, representing the altar, occupied one end; six candles burned thereon, three on each side of a plain wooden crucifix, which stood before an old representation of the crucifixion, that whilome had adorned some more consecrated fane.

Bowing down before this rude altar, with eyes full of fervour, and piety, and glory, was the aged priest, who, not a hundred yards from the same spot, had, but a few hours before, craved and received alms from the hands of the regicide noble; but now his aspect was very different, for he wore the rich vestments of other days, when he was one of St. Giles' sixteen prebendaries; and he held aloft a round silver chalice, which he

had saved from the plunder of the church by the bailies of Edinburgh. The bell was ringing, and he was in the act of celebrating mass, before an anxious and fearful, but devout few, who, despite the terrible laws passed against them by the men of the new *regime*, met thus in secret to worship God after the fashion of their fathers, preferring the mystical forms and ceremonies which had been handed down to them by the priests of other years, to a new hierarchy, upheld by the swords of the unlettered peers and homicidal barons of 1560. The women, fearful and pale, were muffled in their hoods and plaids; the men were all well armed, and not a few grasped their poniards, and keenly scrutinised the Earl on his entrance.

All the long-forgotten piety of his childhood—all the memory of those days of innocence, when his pious mother, Agnes of Sinclair, taught him first to raise his little hands in prayer in Blantyre's stately priory—gushed back upon his heart. Making a sign of the cross, he knelt down among the people; and, overcome by the influence of old associations, by the sudden vision of an altar and the mass, and by the terrible knowledge of what he was *now* in the sight of that Being whom he trembled to address, he burst into an agony of prayer.

Again and again the mass-bell rang, and lower bent every head before that humble altar, on which all present deemed (for such is the force of faith) that the invoked Spirit of God was descending, and the Destroyer trembled in his inmost soul. He covered his head with his mantle, and bent all his thoughts on Heaven, in prayers for mercy and forgiveness.

A shower of tears came to his aid, and his thirst passed away; but oh! how deep were those mental agonies, of which he dared to inform no one!

It was long since he had wept, and he could not recall the time; but his tears were salt and bitter. They relieved him; after a few minutes he became more composed; and the stern necessity of returning instantly to Holyrood pressed vividly upon him; but he dreaded to attract attention or suspicion of treachery, by moving away. Among those present, he recognised many citizens who outwardly had conformed to the new religion; but thus, in secret, clung to the old. Near him knelt young Sir Arthur Erskine, captain of the queen's archers, in his glittering doublet of cloth-of-gold; and a beautiful girl of eighteen, whose dark brown hair was but half-concealed by her

piquant hood (*à la Mary*), was kneeling by his side, and reading from the same missal. Their heads were bent together, and their hair mingled, as the young girl's shoulder almost rested on the captain's breast.

Bothwell saw that they were lovers ; for nothing could surpass the sweetness and confidence of the girl's smile when she gazed on Sir Arthur's face ; for then the impulses of love and religion together, lit up her eyes with a rapture that made her seem something divine.

The Earl thought of Mary—of the desperate part he had yet to play ; of all he had dared and done, and had yet to dare and do ; the paroxysm passed, and he felt his heart nerved with renewed courage.

Love revived—remorse was forgotten ; and, the moment mass was over, he stole away—hurried to Holyrood—gained his apartments unseen, swallowed a horn of brandy to drown all recollection, and flung himself on his bed, to await the coming discovery and the coming day.

CHAPTER LII.

GUILT LEVELS ALL.

A STUPOR, not a slumber, sank upon him ; it weighed down his eyelids, it confused his faculties, and oppressed his heart ; but even that state of half unconsciousness was one of bliss, compared to the mental torture he had endured.

The tolling of the great alarm bell of the city, which usually summoned the craftsmen to arms, and the gathering hum of startled multitudes, murmuring like the waves of a distant ocean, as the citizens were roused by those who kept watch and ward, awoke Earl Bothwell. He listened intently. Loudly and clearly the great bell rang on the wind, above the hum of the people pouring downwards like a sea, to chafe against the palace gates. Then came distant voices, crying—

“ Armour !—armour !—fie !—treason !”

Steps came hastily along the resounding corridor ; there was a sharp knocking at the door of his chamber, and, without waiting for the usual ceremony of being introduced by a page, Master George Halkett, the Earl of Huntly, and Hepburn of

Bolton, entered. The latter was now in complete armour, that the visor might conceal the terrible expression of his altered face.

"How now, Master Halkett?" asked the Earl with affected surprise. "Whence this intrusion? What is the matter?"

"Matter enough, I trow!" replied the other; "the king's house has been blown up, and his majesty slain."

"Jesu!" cried the Earl, leaping from his bed, glad to find in action a refuge from his own solitary thoughts. "Fie! treason! Surely thou ravest! Speak, Bolton!"

Bolton replied in a voice so inarticulate that it was lost in the hollow of his helmet; for his mind seemed a chaos of despair and stupefaction. Since that terrible hour he had vainly been endeavouring to arrange his thoughts and act like a sane man.

"'Tis the verity, my lord!" continued Halkett. "Hark! how the roar increaseth in the town."

"And who, say they, hath done this dark deed?"

"All men accuse the Earls of Morton and Moray," replied Huntly, who had been industriously spreading the rumour, which their known hostility to Darnley made common at the time.

"Fie! treason!" cried Bothwell, bustling about. "Armour!—a Bothwell! Harkee, French Paris—Calder, ho! my pyne doublet and sword!"

"Nay! thou hadst better take armour," said Bolton.

"Right! there lies a Milan suit in yonder cabinet. Sirs, my pages are gone Heaven knows where—I crave service—my points, I pray you truss them."

Huntly and Bolton brought the mail from the carved cabinet, and hastily accoutred the Earl. It was a Milan suit, a very beautiful one of the late King James's fashion, washed with silver; the corselet was globular, having puckered lamboys of steel in lieu of tassettes, and a bourgoinette, with a metonière acting as a gorget. He could have concealed his face perfectly by this peculiar appendage to the headpiece; but his natural boldness and daring now rendered such a measure unnecessary. The moment the accoutring was over, he was left alone; for Master Halkett hurried away from chamber to chamber, being one of those who love to be the first bearers of startling tidings; Huntly departed to arm his retinue for any emer-

gency, and Bolton to array the archer guard, and bear back the armed populace, who were clamouring at the palace gates.

Aware how much his future fate depended on the issue of his first interview with Mary, the Earl could bear suspense no longer; and aware that she would now be roused, notwithstanding the untimely hour, he resolved to seek her apartments; the daylight, his sword, and armour had restored his confidence.

Coldly and palely the February dawn was brightening: though the stillness of midnight lay yet upon the dewy hills, there was a din within the city that might "awake the dead." There was a melancholy solemnity about the dull grey dawn, and the gloomy façade of the old monastic edifice, that oppressed the Earl's heart as he crossed its empty court, and heard the jingle of his armour echoed in the dark arcades, where pages and servitors were hurrying to and fro; while quick steps and sharp voices rang in the long corridors and stone ambulatories of the old palace. As he approached James V's tower, where the queen occupied those apartments that are now daily exhibited to the curious, a man in a complete suit of black armour jostled him.

"Ormiston!" he exclaimed.

"Well met, Lord Earl—good morrow!" replied his evil mentor, in a whisper. "The whole city is agog now, and every voice is raised against the Lord Moray—a lucky infatuation for us. The blue banner hath been displayed by the conveners of the corporations, whose thirty-three pennons are all unfurled; so the rascally craftsmen are fast mustering in their helmets for trouble and tulzie; while Craigmillar and the Lord Lindesay, with their lances, are coming in on the spur. But whither goest thou?"

"To the queen."

"Fool! fool! is this a time?"

"There *was* a time," replied the Earl, bitterly, "when such a varlet as thou dared not have spoken thus to Bothwell."

"True," replied the other, with a sardonic grin; "but *guilt*, like misfortune, levels all men. Tarry—the queen—"

"No, no—I must see her! Not hell itself shall keep me from her!"

"Ha! ha!" laughed Ormiston, as the Earl ascended the

staircase; "odsboddy! why, a stone wall or a stout cord would keep a stronger lover than thee well enow."

Bothwell felt now all the humility and agony of being in the power of this unscrupulous ruffian, and he sighed bitterly more than once as he advanced towards the royal apartments.

"Now," thought he, "must I doubly dye my soul in guilt—the guilt of black hypocrisy. Oh, to be what I have been! How dark are the clouds—how many the vague alarms—that involve the horizon of my fate! Last night—and the recollection of that irreparable deed—could I blot them from memory, happiness might yet be mine."

A crowd of yeomanry of the guard, in their scarlet gaber-dines, with long poniards and partisans; archers in green, with bent bows and bristling arrows; pages in glittering dresses, and gentlemen in waiting, all variously armed, made way at the entrance of the queen's apartments, near the door marked with Rizzio's blood. After a brief preliminary it was opened—the heavy Gobeline tapestry was raised, and the Earl found himself in the presence of—Mary.

When he beheld her, every scruple and regret, every remnant of remorse again evaporated, and he felt that he had done nothing that he would not repeat.

She was plainly and hurriedly attired in a sacque of blue Florence silk, tied with a tassel round her waist. The absence of her high ruff revealed more than usual of her beautifully delicate neck and swelling bosom; while the want of her long peaked stays and stiffened skirts, displayed all the grace and contour of her graceful form. Save the rings that flashed on her fingers, she was without jewels; and in a profusion, such as the Earl had never seen before—her bright and luxuriant auburn hair fell unbound upon her shoulders, covered only by a square of white lace, a long and sweeping veil that (as old Juvenal says), "like a tissue of woven air," floated around her. Her snow-white feet were without stockings, for she had just sprung from bed, and the short slippers of blue velvet shewed her delicately veined insteps and taper ankles in all their naked beauty.

Her brow and rounded cheeks were pale as death; but, though suffused with tears, her eyes were full of fire, and there was more perhaps of anger than of grief in the quivering of her short upper lip. Aware of her dishabille, and that the Countess

of Argyle, and other ladies of the court, who were all in their night-dresses, had fled at the Earl's approach, as so many doves would have done from a vulture, leaving her almost alone with him—the Queen cast down her long dark lashes for a moment, and then bent her keen gaze full upon Bothwell, whose open helmet revealed the pallor of his usually careless, jovial, and nutbrown face.

"Forth from its raven fringe the full glance flies,
Ne'er with such force the swiftest arrow flew;
'Tis as the snake, late coil'd, who pours his length,
And hurls at once his venom and his strength."

Powerful and daring as he was, the Earl quailed beneath her eye; but immediately recovering his admirable air of self-possession, he began in the most courteous manner to deplore the dreadful event, "which," says the Knight of Halhill, "he termed the strangest catastrophe that ever was heard of; for thunder had come out of the sky, and burnt the house of the king, whose body was found lying dead at a little distance from the ruins under a tree."

"Thunder, sayest thou?" reiterated the Queen. "Sweet mother Mary—assist us! Some of the archers of our guard, Lord Earl, men whose bows were drawn at Pinkiecleugh and Ancrumford, aver that the ruins bear marks of Friar Bacon's art rather than electricity. Thunder!—"

"What does your majesty mean?"

"Lord Earl," replied Mary, in a low emphatic tone; "this—this is—*thy* doing—*thine*!"

"Madam—madam—" urged the Earl, but his tongue refused its office, and clove to the roof of his mouth.

"Hah, my Lord!" continued the Queen; "is it the astonishment of innocence, or the shame of guilt, that paralyses thy too ready tongue at this terrible moment? I see thou art guilty," she added, in a sepulchral voice; and now thou comest before me covered with the blood of my husband."

"I swear to your majesty—"

"Swear not! Else whence do your hands tremble? Why is your face thus pale—yea, pale as Ruthven's seemed on that other fatal night—a year ago in *this* chamber?"

Gathering courage from desperation, the kneeling noble, hoping to be interrupted in his vow, replied—

"I swear to you, gracious madam, by heaven and all that is in it—by the earth and all that is on it—by the souls of my Catholic ancestors—by the bones of my father—by my own salvation and honour; which I prize more than life—by your love, your esteem, to win which I would gladly peril more than a thousand lives—"

"Enough!" replied the Queen, interrupting the terrible falsehood, and covering her face with her hands; "pardon my grief and horror—I believe thee. There—kiss my hand in token of trust."

Bothwell's heart was touched by her innocent confidence; he became giddy, and almost reeled.

"O Mary! my wish, my hope, my dream! Would that I were pure enough to be worthy of thee!" said the Earl, in a touching voice; for a moment his heart was crushed by sorrow and remorse, as he pressed to his lip the soft, small hand of the queen. But she did not hear these pathetic exclamations, which conveyed all the Earl's secret in their tone; for at that moment a group that crossed the palace yard riveted all her faculties.

Sir Arthur Erskine and Hepburn of Bolton, both sheathed in armour, with a band of their archers, appeared escorting a few yeomen of the guard, who bore on their crossed partisans a body muffled in a soldier's mantle, and followed by a crowd of gentlemen, grooms, pages, and armed craftsmen.

She shuddered. The weak points of Darnley's character, his folly, his foppery, his profligacy, his neglect of herself, and the wanton murder of her secretary, all vanished from her memory for the time, and she saw him only as she had seen him first in the hall of Wemyss—handsome, tall, and graceful—in all the bloom of youth, nobility, and comeliness, with his dark eye sparkling and his feathers waving, and all the blind devotion which at two-and-twenty had become a part of her very being, and which had absorbed young Henry Stuart into her very soul, came back vividly and painfully upon her mind.

She tottered to a seat.

Her eyes assumed a tearless and stony aspect—a cloud of horror descended upon her snowy brow; and the Earl felt bitterly as he gazed on her, that his presence, and the love he had so daringly expressed, were alike unheeded or forgotten.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE PREBEND OF ST. GILES.

AFTER an uneasy slumber, in the place where we left him a few pages back, Konrad was awakened by a rough grasp being laid on his shoulder, and a voice crying—

“Hurl him forth, till we find what manner of carle he is!” and, ere he was thoroughly roused, several strong hands dragged him to the door of that solitary little chapel, where he found himself in the presence of two knights on horseback, and a band of mailed men-at-arms, bearing hackbuts and partisans, and carrying a banner bearing a blue shield charged with the heart and mullets of Morton.

It was a beautiful spring morning. The sun was rising above the eastern hills, and gilding the peaks of the Pentlands, that towered above the wreaths of gauzy mist rolling round their heath-clad bases.

“Whence comest thou, fellow?” asked the first knight, who was no other than our ferocious acquaintance, Lord Lindesay of the Byres, who, with his men-at-arms, had been scouring the adjacent country for some one upon whom to execute his vengeance.

“Some accomplice and abettor of the Lord Moray!” observed the other; “art and part at least—for all the city saith that he committed the deed; at least, there are *those* who find their interest in circulating the report most industriously.”

“Tush! the Lord Moray abideth at his tower of Donibristle; and I will maintain body to body against any man, that he lieth foully in his throat who accuseth James Stuart of being concerned in the slaughter of last night.”

“But, dustifute—knave—speak! whence comest thou?”

“By what right dost thou ask?” said Konrad, starting at the voice of the questioner, who had the policy to keep his visor down, and affected not to recognise his acquaintance of the hostlery.

“What right? false loon! the right of my rank. I am James Earl of Morton; and now that I look on thee, thou tattered villain—by St. Paul! I see the King’s cloak on thy shoulders. We all know the Lord Darnley’s scarlet mantle, sirs, with its

gold embroidery ; and doth its splendour not contrast curiously with this foreigner's rags and tatters?"

"By cock and pie!" said Ormiston under his helmet, as he pushed through the crowd at this juncture, "I would swear to it as I would to my own nose, or to the King's toledo sword, which I now see by the side of this double thief and traitor! We all know him, sirs! The unco'—the foreigner—who with John of Park attempted to assassinate my Lord of Bothwell in Hermitage glen. Last night he escaped from the tower of Holyrood."

"Close up, my merry men all!" said Morton; "forward, pikemen—bend your hackbuts; for we have meshed one of the knaves at last."

There was a terrible frown gathering on the brow of Lindesa. This ferocious peer, and uncompromising foe of the ancient church, was distinguished by the sternness and inflexibility of his character, even in that iron age; and the fire of his keen grey eye increased the expression of his hard Scottish, yet noble features, and thick grizzled beard, which consorted so well with the antique fashion of his plain steel armour, with its grotesque and gigantic knee and elbow joints projecting like iron fans, with pauldrons on the shoulders. His salade was of the preceding century, and was surmounted by his crest, a silver ostrich bearing in its beak a key—on his colours, a roll azure and argent. Unsheathing his long shoulder-sword, he said with stern solemnity—

"Now, blessed be God! that hath given us this great and good fortune to-day. These ruins, where that mother of blasphemy and abomination—who hath made whole nations drunk with the cup of her iniquities—once practised her idolatries, seem to have rare tenants this morning. First, amid the walls of Leonard's chapel, we found that worshipper of graven images—Tarbet, the mass-priest, with all his missals and mummery in right order for the pillory at the Tron; and *here*, in the oratory of the Baptist, we have started our other game—one of the regicides, whose body shall be torn piecemeal, even as Græme and Athol were torn of old; yea, villain! embowelled and dismembered shalt thou be, while the life yet flickers in thy bleeding heart! but, first, thou shalt be half-hanged from yonder tree. Quick! a knotted cord, some of ye!"

"Nay, my good Lord of Lindesay," interrupted Morton, "I

would reserve him for the Queen's council, whose examination may bring to light much of whilk we are still in ignorance."

"Now, by my father's bones!" began fierce Lindesay, clenching his gauntleted hand with sudden passion, "must I remind thee, who wert High Chancellor of Scotland, and, as such, chief in all matters of justice—the king's most intimate councillor, and holder of that seal, without the touch of which not a statute of the estates can pass forth to the people—must I remind thee of that ancient Scottish law by which our forefathers decreed, if a murderer be taken REDHAND, he should incontinently be executed within three days after commission of the deed? and here, within a mile of the Kirk-of-Field, we find a known comrade of Park, the border outlaw, with the sword and mantle of our murdered king—"

"Yea," interrupted a voice from the band, "a cloak which I saw in the King's chamber but yesternight."

"What other proof lack we?" said Lindesay.

"Away with him!" cried several voices, and Ormiston's among them; "for he hath assuredly murdered the King!"

To all these fiercely-uttered accusations Konrad had not a word to reply in extenuation or defence; and his astonishment and confusion were easily mistaken for guilt and fear.

"As thou pleasest, Lindesay," said Morton coldly, for he was unused to find his advice neglected. "To me it mattereth not whether he be hanged now or a year hence. I have but one thing more to urge. Let us confront him with the mass-priest Tarbet, and I warrant that, by blow of boot and wrench of rack, we may make some notable discoveries. We know not *whom* they may, in their agony, accuse as accessories if we give them a hint;" and indeed the Earl might have added that he did not care, while he was not accused himself.

But his own time was measured.

Lindesay seemed struck by this advice (as there was an estate bordering his own which he had long coveted), and so ordering the prisoner to be secured by cords, and gagged, by having a branch cut from a hawthorn bush tied across his mouth so tightly that the blood oozed from his torn lips. He was then bound to the tail of a horse, and thus ignominiously conducted back to the excited city, escorted by Morton's band of hackbuttiers.

Had an English army, flushed with victory, been crossing the Esk, a greater degree of excitement could not have reigned in

the Scottish capital than its streets exhibited on this morning, the 11th of February, 1567.

The crafts were all in arms, and the spacious Lawnmarket was swarming with men in armour, bearing pikes, hackbuts, and Jedwood axes, two-handed swords, and partisans; while the pennons of the various corporations—the cheveron and triple towers of the sturdy Masons—the shield, ermine, and triple crowns of the Skinners—the gigantic shears of the Tailors—and so forth, were all waving in the morning wind. Splendidly accoutred, a strong band of men-at-arms stood in close array near the deep arch of Peebles Wynd, around the residence of the provost, Sir Simeon Preston of Craigmillar, whose great banner, bearing a *scudo pendente*, the cognisance peculiar to this illustrious baron, was borne by his knightly kinsman, Congalton of that Ilk.

A half-mad preacher, in a short Geneva cloak and long bands, and wearing a long-eared velvet cap under his bonnet, had ensconced himself in a turret of the city cross, from whence, with violent gestures, in a shrill intonation of voice, he was holding forth to a scowling rabble of craftsmen, and women in Gueldrian coifs and Galloway kirtles, who applauded his discourse, which he was beating down with Knox-like emphasis, and striking his clenched hand on the cope of the turret with such fury that he had frequently to pause, make a wry face, and blow upon it. Then, with increased wrath, he thundered his anathemas against the “shavelings of Rome, the priests of antichrist—the relics of their saints—their corrupted flesh—their rags and rotten bones—their gilded shrines and mumming pilgrimages!” Sternly he spoke, and wildly, too, with all the enthusiasm of a convert, and the rancour of an apostate, for he was both.

A few yards further down the sunlit street stood one of those very shavelings against whom he was pouring forth the vials and the vehemence of his wrath. At the Tron beam stood the aged Tarbet on a platform, a few feet above the pavement. By a cord that encircled his neck, his head was tied close to the wooden column supporting the tron, or great steelyard where the merchants weighed their wares; and to that his ear was fixed by a long iron nail, from which the blood was trickling. Faint and exhausted, the old man clung with feeble hands to the pillar to avoid strangulation, as his knees were refusing their office. He was still in his vestments, with the cross embroidered

on his stole; a rosary encircled his neck, and, to excite the mockery of the mob, a missal, a chalice, and censer were tied to it; and while enduring the greatest indignities to which the in-born cowardice, cruelty, and malevolence of the vulgar can subject the unfortunate and the fallen, inspired by the memory of the greater martyr who had suffered for him, he blessed them repeatedly in return. The boys were yelling "Green Sleeves!"—"John, cum kiss me now," and other songs, converted from Catholic hymns into profane ribaldry; ever and anon, as Knox tells us, serving him with "his Easter eggs," meaning every available missile, and under the shower that poured upon him the old man was sinking fast. At last a stone struck his forehead, the blood burst over his wrinkled face, and drenched his silver hair. He tottered, sank, and hung strangling by the neck; and then, but not till then, he was released and borne away to the nearest barrier, where he was again expelled the city, with the warning that to say mass once more would involve the penalty of instant death.

The tide was now completely turned against the ancient clergy, and the sternest means were used by the new against them. Knox had declared that the toleration of a single mass was more dangerous to Scotland than 10,000 armed soldiers; and in the spirit of this precept, so long after the Reformation as 1615, a poor Jesuit was dragged from his altar in an obscure cellar, and hanged by King James's authority in the streets of Glasgow.

It was while the minds of the people were in the state we have described—excited by the terrible death of the King, inspired by the discourse of the firebrand on the cross, and only half glutted by the persecution of the poor old prebend of St. Giles, that, guarded by Morton's and Lindesay's band, Konrad of Saltzberg was led up Merlin's Wynd, and into the High Street, where the masses of men, in a state of fury and ferment, swayed to and fro from side to side of that magnificent thoroughfare, like the waves of an angry sea. The moment he appeared there was given a yell that rent the air; and a rush was made from all quarters towards the new victim, of whose participation in the deed at the Kirk-of-Field a terrible account was instantly circulated.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE PAPISTS' PILLAR.

WE have likened the dense mass that filled the High Street to a sea, and so like the waves of a sea, when agitated by a stormy wind, was that mass urged in one direction towards this new victim, whom they demanded of both Morton and Lindesay to be given up to their summary vengeance. The windows were crowded to excess; and at the great square casement of his mansion, overlooking the Netherbow, was seen the grave and serious face of Knox the Reformer, with his portentous beard and Geneva cap, and beside him Master George Buchanan, with his stern visage and towering brow. They were observing the fray below, and making their caustic remarks on "yat terrible fact of yesternicht."

A deadly struggle seemed about to ensue; faces became flushed with passion, and eyes lit with energy—swords were drawn, bows bent, and matches blown.

"Truncheon me those knaves!" cried Lord Lindesay, as the people pressed upon his band and impeded their march; "use the bolles of your hackbuts! Back with these rascally burghers—how! dare they assail my banner in open day?"

"They are ripe for a fray, my lord," said Morton; "and in sooth, 'tis matter for consideration, whether by resistance we should shed the blood of our own countrymen, to lengthen by an hour the existence of a foreign knave, who must hang at all events."

"Right, Lord Earl—but to die thus! unhouselled and unprayed for—by the hands of a furious mob—to be torn piecemeal—to be hunted like an otter—"

Lindesay could not conclude, for the confusion increased every moment, and the dense and well-armed multitude demanded incessantly, and with stentorian clamour, that the regicide should be given up to their fury. Lindesay, who now became animated by a sentiment of compassion, on beholding one man in a situation so terrible, vainly endeavoured by the influence of his rank, his known determination and aspect, his stentorian voice and gigantic sword, to overawe the crowd, and convey his captive to King David's tower; but everywhere the

craftsmen barred his way with levelled pikes and clubbed hackbuts. As yet, not a shot had been exchanged, or a blow struck; for the vassals who guarded Konrad, being quite indifferent as to the issue, behaved with admirable coolness. On seeing this, the populace demanded the prisoner more loudly than ever, and became more energetic and exasperated by the delay.

Gagged and bound, the unhappy Konrad found the impossibility alike of demanding either protection from his guards or mercy from their assailants—to fight or to escape; and a cold perspiration burst over him as the soldiers swayed to and fro, when the people pressed upon their iron ranks.

Ten thousand scowling faces were bent upon him, and twice that number of hands were raised against him. His heart never sank; but the mild precepts of Father Tarbet were forgotten, and, with an intensity amounting to agony, he longed to be free and armed, to indulge that momentary and tiger-like hatred of all mankind that swelled up within him, that he might sell his life as dearly as possible, and strike for vengeance ere he died! In that terrible moment of confusion and dread he never thought of prayer; but the image of Anna rose to his memory, and while he thanked Heaven that now she was probably safe at home in their native Norway, the recollection that he was desolate, and she was lost to him for ever, nerved him the more to encounter his terrible fate.

Lord Lindesay threatened them with summary vengeance from himself, and ultimately from the queen and lord provost; but he might as well have addressed the wind, for, by their nightly watches and constant brawling, the burghers were better trained to arms than were the vassals of the landowners, and his threats were unheeded.

“Come on, my bold callants!” cried a fat citizen in a vast globular corselet, a morion, and plate sleeves with gloves of steel, brandishing a ponderous jedwood axe with his right hand, while opposing with his left arm a light Scottish target to the levelled spears of Lindesay’s band. “Come on, with a warrion! Are sae mony bearded men to be kept at play like bairns by these ox-goads o’ the Byres?”

“Weel spoken, Adam!—Armour! armour!—Strike for the gude toun!” cried a thousand voices to the host of the Red Lion, who was looming about like a vast hogshead sheathed in

iron; and thus encouraged, by sheer weight of body he burst through the ranks of Lindesay's vassalage, striking up their levelled lances. The mob followed in his wake, and the guards were immediately scattered, disarmed, and their prisoner dragged from his shelter.

Torn and whirled from hand to hand, Konrad was soon released from all his bonds; but still escape was impossible. Many a bow was drawn, and many a blade uplifted against him; but the very presence and blind fury of the people saved him; and madly he was hurled from man to man, till, alike bereft of sense of sight and sound, he sank breathless beneath their feet.

"Now, by the might of Heaven!" said old Lord Lindesay, "'tis a foul shame on us, Earl of Morton, to sit calmly here in our saddles, and see a Christian man used thus. Fie!—down with the traitors!" and he spurred his horse upon the people, only to be repelled by a steady stand of pikes.

Konrad was loaded with mud and filth; and every new assailant was more fierce than the last. Howls, yells, and execrations filled the air, and he was bandied about like a foot-ball, till one well-aimed blow from the boll of a hackbut struck him down, and, covered with mud and bruises, and bathed in blood, he lay upon the pavement motionless, and to all appearance dead.

They deemed him so, and, consequently, a momentary cessation of their cruelty ensued, till a voice cried—

"Fie! away wi' him to the Papists' pillar! Gar douk him in the loch! Harl him awa'! Gar douk! gar douk and droun!"

A shout of assent greeted this new proposition. The inanimate form of Konrad was raised on the shoulders of a few sturdy fellows, who bore him along the street with as much speed as its crowded state would permit; and closing, like a parted sea, the mob collapsed behind, and followed in their train. They bore him up the Lawnmarket, then encumbered by innumerable sacks of grain and wooden girdles, farm horses, and rudely constructed carts; for at that time the meal, and flesh, and butter markets, were held there. Turning down Blyth's close, under the lofty windows of the palace of Mary of Lorraine, they hurried to the bank of that steep lake which formed the city's northern barrier, and the vast concourse followed; the arch of the narrow alley receiving them all, like a small bridge admitting a mighty river.

The rough and shelving bank descended abruptly from the ends of the lofty closes, which (when viewed from the east or west) resembled a line of narrow Scottish towers overhanging the margin of the water, which was reedy, partly stagnant, and so much swollen by the melted snows of the past winter, that, on the northern side, it reached an ancient quarry from which the Trinity Church was built, and on the southern to the *Twin-tree*, an old double-trunked thorn that overhung the loch, and had for centuries been famous as a trysting-place for lovers, as it was supposed to exercise a supernatural influence on the pair who sat between its gnarled stems.

"Fie! gar douk!" cried the vast concourse that debouched from all the adjoining wynds and closes along the sloping bank. "To the pillar—to the pillar! Truss him wi' a tow to the Papists' pillar, and leave him there to rot or row;" and this new proposal was received with renewed applause.

The Papists' pillar was a strong oak stake fixed in that part of the loch where the water was about five feet deep. It had been placed there by the wise bailies of Edinburgh at this time, when certain ablutions were much in vogue, and considered so necessary for witches, sorcerers, scolding wives, and "obstinate papists;" for in every part of Europe ducking was the favourite penance for offences against morality; and nothing afforded such supreme delight and intense gratification to the worthy denizens of the Lawnmarket, and their kindly dames, as the sousing of an unfortunate witch, a "flyting wife" of the Calton, or a hapless Catholic, in the deep and execrable puddle that was named the North Loch—and so frequently were exhibitions of the latter made, that the stake was unanimously dubbed *the Papists' Pillar*.

To this the inanimate Konrad was fastened by a strong cord, encircling his neck and waist; and there he was left to perish, wounded, bleeding, and insensible—covered with bruises, and merged nearly to the neck in a liquid rendered fetid and horrible by all the slime and debris of the populous city that towered above it, being poured down hourly from its narrow streets to increase the mass of corruption that grew and festered in its stagnant depths.

On accomplishing this, the mob retired; for the conveyance of the bodies of the murdered king and his attendants through the streets, excited all the morbid sympathy of the vulgar: the entire populace now rushed towards the other end of the city, and all became still as death where Konrad lay.

The coolness of the sudden immersion partially revived him, and the bleeding of the wound on his head ceased; but his senses were confused—his perception indistinct—and he hung against the column in a state bordering on insensibility.

There was a rushing sound in his ears; for still the roar of that vast multitude rang in them; there was a sense of pain and languor pervading his whole frame; a faint light shone before his half-closed eyes, and he was conscious of nothing more.

The noon passed away; evening came, and cold and pale the watery sun sank behind the summits of Corstorphine, involved in yellow haze. The clouds gathered in inky masses to the westward; a few large drops of rain plashed on the dark surface of the glassy water; there was a low wind rushing among the uplands; but Konrad neither saw nor heard these precursors of a coming storm.

And there he lay—helpless and dying!

A great and ravenous gled wheeled in circles round him. These circles diminished by degrees, until it had courage at last to alight on the top of the column, where it screamed and flapped its wings, while eyeing him with eager and wolfish impatience. So passed the evening.

Night—the cold and desolate night of February, came on, and the hungry gled was still sitting there.

In the morning, the inexorable host of the Red Lion and others, who had made themselves so active in his persecution, went to the place where they had bound him.

The water had ebbed several feet; the stake was still standing there among the dark slime and sedges—but the cords were cut, and the unfortunate had disappeared.

CHAPTER LV.

REMORSE.

BOTHWELL was sitting alone in his apartments at Holyrood. The fire burned cheerfully in the sturdy iron grate, and threw a ruddy glow on the gigantic forms of Darius and Alexander, who seemed ready to start from the gobeline tapestry into life and action. The Earl's sword and dagger hung on one knob of his chair, his headpiece and a wheel-lock caliver on the other; for

there were dangerous rumours abroad in the city, and he knew not the moment in which he might be required to use them.

Let us take a view of him as he sat gazing fixedly into the fire, that glowed so redly between the massive bars.

A change had come over his features since the preceding night. They had acquired a more severe style of manly beauty. His noble brow was more pale and thoughtful in expression, and was already marked by those lines which are indicative of sorrow and remorse. But there were times when his keen dark eye assumed a diabolical glitter, and the redness of the fire shed an infernal brightness on his face. His lip was curled by bitterness; his brows were knit; and then nothing could surpass the scorn and misanthropy pervading the aspect of the fierce and haughty regicide.

Yes! he knew himself a destroyer; though, strange to say, he felt his personal importance increased by the awful reflection that he was so. He had more than once slain men in mutual strife; but never till now did he feel himself a—murderer.

Murderer! he repeated it in a low voice and then started, looking round fearfully as if he dreaded the figures might hear him. He frequently caught himself muttering it, coupled with his own name. They seemed synonymous. His mind was full of incoherence and dread, and a regret so intense, that at times he smote his breast and wrung his hands in agony, or turned to a flask of Burgundy to drown all recollection; and so much was he absorbed in the fierce current of his own corroding thoughts, that he heard not the rising storm that shook the turrets of the palace, howled through the arcades of its ancient courts, and tossed the branches of its venerable trees.

A step rung in the antechamber; the tapestry was lifted, and the slight figure of Hepburn of Bolton, still sheathed in armour, appeared. His helmet was open, and the paleness of his features was painful to look upon.

“Well!” said his chieftain; “what say they in the city?”

“Everywhere, that the Lord Moray has slain the king, in pursuance of his ancient feud with the house of Lennox.”

“This is well! I hope thou and Hob Ormiston have been spreading the report with due industry!”

“We have lacked in nothing!” replied Bolton, gloomily, as he drank a deep draught of the Burgundy; “but there is noised

abroad a counter-rumour, that *thou* art not unconcerned in the deed."

"Hah!" ejaculated the Earl, drawing in his breath through his clenched teeth, while a frown of alarm contracted his brow, "Who value life so cheaply as to bruit this abroad?"

"The vassals of the Lord Morton, with whom certain archers of my band have been carousing at Ainslie's hostel over night, have accused thee, and so strongly, that I sorely suspect treason somewhere, and that their lord hath prompted them."

"He dares not!" rejoined the Earl, half assuming his sword, and setting his teeth.

"Thou knowest how false and subtle all men deem him."

"He dare not prove so to me—I tell thee, John of Bolton, he dare not!" replied the Earl, in a fierce whisper, starting to his feet. "I would level to the earth his castle of Dalkeith, and spike his head amidst its ruins. There is the bond, the damning deed we signed at Whittinghame, that will cause us all to hang together in our armour, lest we hang separately without it. Ha! ha! take another horn of the Burgundy. Thou seest, Bolton, how it gives me both wit and spirit. Any other tidings?"

"None, save of a horrible apparition that last night haunted the Lord Athol's lodging, near the Kirk-of-Field."

"And what about our Norwegian?"

"He hath been bound to the Papists' pillar, and left to drown."

"Now, God's malison be on these rascally burghers!"

"By this time he must be dead, for the rain hath fallen heavily, and thou knowest how fast the loch fills; besides, the host of the Red Lion shut the sluice at the Trinity House, so long ere this all must be over."

"One other life!" said the Earl gloomily.

Hepburn gave a bitter laugh, and there was a momentary pause.

"By heaven, Bolton! I will not permit this stranger to perish if I can save him. Come—'tis not yet midnight! The deed may in some sort atone—"

"True—true! but there will be some danger, and much suspicion—"

"Danger—so much the better! Suspicion—I hope we are above it! In a brawl about a rascally courtesan, how readily

did I draw my sword with that blockhead d'Elbœuff; while to-day I stood by yonder Tron, and saw, on one hand, a consecrated priest of God insulted, pilloried, and beaten down senseless in his blood—a priest who yesternight celebrated the most holy of all Christian sacraments; on the other, I saw an innocent man dragged away to a merciless and dreadful death; and, like a child or a woman, I stood paralysed, without giving a word or a blow to save either. Coward that I was! Oh, how deeply would old Earl Adam, who fell by James's side on Flodden Field, blush for his degenerate grandson!"

"Be it so; I will doff some of this iron shell, and, if thou wilt lend me a pyne doublet, will go with thee. Hark! what a drierch storm without; and how the windows dirl in the blast!" and, as he spoke, the rain, blown with all the violence of a furious east wind, came lashing on the lofty casements of the palace, and hissed as it plashed drearily on the pavement of its empty courts.

"Summon French Paris!" cried the Earl; "I must first speak with him."

CHAPTER LVI.

THE RESCUE.

As the night closed, Konrad partially revived, and became alive to the horror of his situation. Corded by the wrists and neck to a stake, with the water almost up to his chin; faint, exhausted by the wound on his head, and the innumerable blows he had received, he was so very feeble that he thought himself dying, and endeavoured to remember a prayer; but his mind was a chaos, and he found himself alike unable to account for his predicament, and to free himself from it.

Darker, and darker still, the clouds gathered over the lofty city that towered up to the south; and the rain-drops plashed more heavily on the surface of the water, till the circles became mingled, and the shower increased to a winter torrent; for the month was February only, and, though the first of spring, the cold was intense.

The gled shook its wings, and croaked on the post above his head, and Konrad feared it might suddenly stoop and tear out his defenceless eyes.

Poured along the gorge between the Calton Hill and the city, the chill wind from the German sea swept over the rippled water; and then came the glare of the lightning to render the darkness of the night more appalling. Pale, blue, and sulphury, it flashed in the north and east, dashing its forky strength between the masses of cloud, gleaming on the darkened water, and revealing the bleak outline of the Calton—the high and fantastic mansions of the city, among whose black summits the levin-bolts seemed playing and dancing—to be tossed from chimney to turret, and from turret to tower—leaping from hand to hand, ere they flashed away into obscurity, or cast one lurid glare on the gorge behind the church that, for four hundred years, covered the grave of Mary of Gueldres and of Zutphen.

Then the thunder rumbled in the distance; and, as if the air was rent, down gushed the rain upon the midnight lake; and Konrad, as he felt his senses and strength ebbing together, became aware that the water rose—that, with all his feeble struggles, he would ultimately drown in that lake of mud, where so many have perished; for, so lately as 1820, the skeletons of these unfortunates have been found in the bed, where of old the water lay.

Still the dusky gled sat on its perch, and, by the occasional gleams of the lightning, he could perceive its sable wings flapping above his unsheltered head, like those of a shadowy fiend; and oft it stooped down, as if impatient of its feast. Whenever its unearthly croak rang on the passing wind, he could not resist the inclination to raise his hands to protect his eyes—but his arms were pinioned below water. Powerless, he resigned himself to die without a murmur—save one prayer for Anna. His last thoughts were of her—for the love of poor Konrad surpassed the love of romance.

Strange visions of home and other years floated before him; he heard the wiry rustle of his native woods, and the voice of Anna mingling with the music of the summer leaves. Then came a state of stupefaction, in which he remained, he knew not how long.

A sound roused him; it was a scream from the gled, as scared from its perch, it spread its broad wings to the wind, and vanished into obscurity like an evil spirit. The stars were veiled in vapour; the moon was sailing through masses of flying cloud, and, by its fitful light, Konrad, as he unclosed his heavy

eyes, could perceive a boat approaching. It contained two figures, which, as they were between him and the light, appeared in dark and opaque outline.

They were Bothwell and Hepburn of Bolton; both were masked as usual to the moustache, and wore their mantles up to their chins.

"If we are not too late," said the first, as they approached; "perhaps this act of mercy may be an atonement—yea, in some wise a small atonement—ha! heardst thou that cry?"

"What cry?"

"By the blessed Bothan, I heard it again!" said Bothwell, in a voice of agony. "Now God me defend!" he added, making the long-forgotten sign of the cross, while a cold perspiration burst over him; "but where is the Norwegian? I see but the stake only!"

"Here, here! his head is above water still. Now praise Heaven! Dost thou live yet?"

Konrad uttered a faint sound; upon which both gave an exclamation of joy, and, urging the boat towards the stake, succeeded in raising him up, cutting the cords, and drawing him on board; but so benumbed and lifeless, that he sank across the thwart, and lay there insensible. Meanwhile, Bolton and the Earl, after pulling a few dozen of strokes, beached the boat, (which they had stolen from the ferryman) among the thick sedges and reeds that fringed the northern bank of the loch. Bothwell sprang ashore, and gave a low whistle. There was a reply heard, and French Paris came out of the ancient quarry before mentioned, (the site of which is now covered by the Scott monument,) leading four horses. Konrad was assisted ashore, and seated upon the bank.

"Now, Paris," said the Earl; "thy hunting bottle!" The page unslung a round leather flask from his waist-belt, and handed it to the Earl, who filled a quaigh with liquid, saying—

"I trust the cordial of which I spoke—that rare reviving compound made by the queen's physician—was mixed with this. Drink, sir, if thou canst, and in three minutes thou wilt be another man."

Konrad, who was still unable to speak, quaffed off the proffered draught, and immediately became revived; for a glow shot through every vein, and warmed his quivering limbs.

"Another," said the Earl, "and thou wilt still further bless

the skill of Monsieur Martin Picauct as a druggist and apothecary. Now, Bolton, our task is done, and we must hie to Holyrood ere daybreak; for this is not a time for men of such light account as we, to be roving about like the owls. To thce, Paris, we will leave the rest. Thou art well assured of where this crayer of Norway lieth."

"At the New-haven, immediately opposite the chapel of St. James."

A shudder ran through the heart of Bolton; for the page's voice sounded at that moment too painfully like his sister's—who, though he knew it not, was probably lying, bruised and mangled out of human form, among the ruins of the Kirk-of-Field.

"Then here we part. Thou wilt see this stranger fitted with dry garments: give him this purse, and bid him go in the name of grace, and cross my path no more; for it is beset with thorns, dangers, and deep pitfalls—and I will not be accountable for the issue of our again forgatherings."

"How well I know that voice!" said Konrad feebly. "Tell me, ere we part, if my suspicions are right. For whom shall I pray this night?"

"Thy greatest enemy—but one who hath every need of prayer," replied the other, in a husky voice.

"Thou art—"

"Hush! James, Earl of Bothwell," replied the noble in a low voice, as he and Bolton mounted, and, without further parley, dashed at full gallop along the bank of the loch and disappeared in the direction of Dingwall's castle, a strong tower, battlemented at the top and furnished with tourelles, that overhung the steep bank above the Trinity House, forming the residence of its provost.

The night was still gloomy and dark, though occasional gleams of moonlight shot across the varied landscape to the north, one moment revealing it all like a picture, and the next veiling it in obscurity.

"Mount, if thou canst," said French Paris, "and wend with me, for we have little time to spare. Our burghers will be all at their accursed pillar, like ravening wolves, by daybreak, and if they should miss, pursue, and overtake thee, our lives would not be worth a brass testoon!"

"And whither wend we?"

"To the seashore—to Our Lady's port of Grace, where there lieth at anchor a trading crayer, commanded by a countryman of thine—Hans Knuber, or some such uncouth name."

"Ha, honest Hans!" exclaimed Konrad with joy. "But how came so great a noble as thy lord to know of this poor skipper?"

"Knowest thou not that he is high admiral of the realm, and that not a cock-boat can spread a sail in the Scottish seas unknown to him?"

"Jovial Hans!" continued Konrad; "I would give my right hand to see thee, and hear thy hearty welcome in our good old Norway. Let us mount and go! Benumbed, and stiff, and sick as I am at heart and in body, thou shalt see, Sir Page (for I know thee of old), that I can ride a horse like the demon of the wind himself."

Nevertheless, Konrad mounted with difficulty, and they progressed but slowly; for the ancient way was steep and winding, and led them far to the westward of the city, which disappeared, as they traversed the steep and broken ground that lay between it and the Firth.

This district was all open and rural, but generally in a high state of cultivation, divided by hedges and fauld-dikes into fallow fields and pasture lands, in some places shaded by thick copsewood, especially round those eminences on which rose the towers of Innerleith and Warriston, between which the roadway wound. These square fortlets were the residences of two of the lesser barons; the first extended his feudal jurisdiction over the ancient village of Silvermills; and the other over that of Picardie, where dwelt a colony of industrious weavers, who had left their sunny France, and, under the wing of the ancient alliance, came hither to teach the Scots the art of weaving silk.

Near some ancient mills, gifted by Robert I. to the monks of Holyrood, the horseway crossed the pebbled bed of the Leith, which brawled and gurgled between rough and stony banks, jagged with rocks and boulders, and overhung by hawthorn, whin, and willow. Soon wood, and tower, and path were left behind, the city lights vanished in the distance, and Konrad, with his guide, entered on a broad and desolate tract, then known as the Muir of Wardie. There their horses sank fetlock deep in the soft brown heather, over which came the jarring murmur of the distant sea, as its waves rolled on the lonely shore of the beautiful estuary.

Then it was a lonely shore indeed !

That broad and desert moorland of many square miles extended to the beach uncheered by house or homestead, by tree or bush, or any other objects than a solitary little chapel of Our Lady and the old tower of Wardie, with its square chimneys and round turrets, overhanging the rocks, on which, urged by the wind, the waves were pouring all their foam and fury, flecking the ocean with white when the moonbeams glinted on its waters.

Broad and spacious links of emerald green lay then between the little fisher-village and the encroaching sea, which has long since covered them ; but their grassy downs had to be traversed by our horsemen ere they reached the wooden pier where the crayer of bluff Hans Knuber lay, well secured by warp and cable, and having her masts, and yards, and rigging all covered, and made snug, to save them from the storms which, at that season of the year, so frequently set in from the German sea.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE CHALLENGE.

THE remains of the unfortunate king, after being embalmed by Picauet the French physician, were interred among his royal ancestors in the aisles of Holyrood, not contemptuously, as some historians tell us, but solemnly and privately ; for Mary dared not have had the burial service of the Catholic Church publicly performed, when, but seven years before, those sepulchral rites were, by the Reformers, denied to her mother.

In the southern aisle of the church of Sanctæ Crucis, near the slab that still marks where Rizzio lies, he was lowered into the tomb, while the torches cast their lurid light on the dark arcades and shadowy vistas of the nave, amid the lamentations and the muttered threats of vengeance—the deep sure vengeance of the feudal days—from the knights and barons of the Lennox.

Attired in sackcloth, poor Mary shut herself up in a darkened chamber hung with black serge, and there for many days she passed the weary hours in vigil and in prayer, for the unshriven soul of that erring husband whom for the past year she had been compelled to hold in abhorrence—a sentiment which she then

remembered with a remorse that increased her pity for his fate.

Bothwell dared not to approach her while this paroxysm lasted; but by plunging into gaiety and riot—by spending the days and nights in revelry with Ormiston and d'Elbœuff—he endeavoured to drown the recollections of the past, to deaden the sense of the present, and to nerve himself for the future; but in vain—one terrible thought was ever present!

It stood like something palpable and visible before him. It seemed written on the fragrant earth, in the buoyant air, and on the shining water, imparting to the sunny spring the gloom of winter. It was in his ears, it was on his tongue, and in his soul; there was no avoiding, no crushing, no forgetting it! Oh, how vividly at times, in the calm silence of the sleepless night, *that cry* came to his ears! and his thoughts were riveted on that grey marble slab in the chapel aisle, beneath which, mangled, cold, and mouldering, lay one—he would smite his damp forehead to drive away the thoughts, and rush to drown his sense of misery in wine.

Amid the hum of the city, when its sunlit thoroughfares were crowded with the gaiety and bustle of passing crowds, all of whom seemed so happy and so gay, it rang in his ears!

Amid the solemn deliberations of the council on border raids and feudal broils—on English wars and French embassies—in all of which he was compelled to take the lead, as the royal favourite and first of the Scottish peers, it came to him sadly and mournfully above the voices of the most able orators; and then his heart sank when he looked on the blanched visages of Morton, of Maitland, and his other copartners in that terrible deed, to which—as if by common consent—they never dared to recur!

Amid the leafy rustle of the woods, as their dewy buds expanded beneath the alternate showers and sunshine of an early spring (if he sought the country), still he heard it!

Amid the deep hoarse murmur of the chafing sea, if he sought the lonely shore, he heard it still—that sad and wailing cry of death and of despair!

Amid the joys of the midnight revel, when the wine sparkled in the gilded glasses—the grapes blushed in their silver baskets—the lofty lamps filled the chamber with rosy light and rich perfume; when the heedless ribaldry of Ormiston, the courtly wit

of d'Elbœuff, the frolicsome spirit of Coldinghame, were all there to make the *present* paramount alike to the past and the future, still it came to him—that terrible sound—the *last cry of Darnley!*

The Queen still remained shut in her darkened chamber, secluded from all—even from the prying ambassador of Elizabeth, who, when introduced, could not discern her face amidst the sombre gloom surrounding her; but, as he informed his mistress, the accents of Mary were both touching and mournful.

Two strange rumours were now floating through the city: one of a spectre which had appeared in the lodging of the Lord Athol on the night of the King's death; the other, of Bothwell's implication in that terrible deed, in which he and his companions had endeavoured (and perhaps not without good grounds) to implicate the Earl of Moray.

No one knew how this rumour gained credence; but each man whispered it to his neighbour. Voices, accusing him of the deed, rang at midnight in the narrow streets of the city; the scholars chalked ribald verses at the corners of the wynds and church-doors; while Moray—openly Bothwell's friend, and secretly his foe—had handbills posted on the portes, naming him as the perpetrator. Furtively these things were done; for few dared to impugn the honour of so powerful a noble, and none could arraign him save the father of the murdered prince Matthew Earl of Lennox, an aged noble, who had served with valour and distinction in the wars of Francis I.; and he boldly charged the Earl with the crime.

Bothwell saw, or imagined he saw, an accusation in the eye of every man whose glance he encountered. Pride, jealousy, and angry suspicion now by turns animated his resentful heart and galled his fiery spirit. He was always conferring secretly with the knights and barons of his train; he kept his vassals ever on the alert, and never went abroad without being completely armed, to prevent a surprise; but daily and hourly, slowly and surely, like an advancing and overwhelming tide, the suspicions of the people grew and waxed stronger, till, clamorously, it burst in one deep hoarse shout against him, and a hundred thousand tongues said, "*Thou art the man!*"

"Malediction on these presumptuous churls!" said the Earl angrily to Ormiston, as they met near the palace gate on the day after Darnley's funeral. "They all accuse me; and there must be treachery somewhere."

"Nay, nay! never think so while that bond of Whittinghame exists. It binds us all, body and soul, to be silent as the grave, and deep as Currie brig."

"But now they speak of the Queen, adding all that the innate malevolence of the vulgar, the hatred that Knox and his compatriots have fostered and fanned, can add; and declaring that she is art and part with those who freed her and the nation from the dominion of the House of Lennox."

"May God forefend!" said Ormiston; for, ruffian as he was, he deemed the national honour at stake under such an accusation. "I would run my sword through the brisket of the first base mechanic who breathed a word of this."

"Breathed a word of it!—Gramercy! French Paris tells me, it is openly discussed by every full-fed burgess at the city cross; by every rascally clown who brings his milk and butter to the Tron; by every archer and pikeman over their cans of twopenny; by every apostate priest and pious psalmist who haunt the houses of Knox, of Craig, and Buchanan. A curse upon the hour when my secret love, my cherished hopes—the name and fame the brave old Lords of Hailes transmitted to me, so spotless and so pure—are turned to ribaldry and jest, to laughter and to scorn, by every foul-mouthed citizen."

"'Tis mighty unlucky all this; for here hath been my Lord Fleming, the great chamberlain, with the queen's especial commendations to your lordship, announcing, that on the morrow she intendeth to lay aside her weeping and wailing, her dumps and dolours, and departing hence for the house of Lord Seaton, a gay place, and a merry withal; and there she hopes you will escort her with your train of lances, for the Lothians are so disturbed that she mistrusts even Arthur of Mar and his band of archers."

"Be it so! Send Bolton to her grace with my dutiful answer," replied the Earl, whose eye lighted up, for he thought that, in the shock Darnley's fate had given her, the queen had forgotten him; "we will be all in our helmets and at her service by cock-crow to-morrow; but first," he added, sternly and impressively, "take this, my better glove, and hang it on yonder city cross, and there to-day at noon announce to all, that I, James Earl of Bothwell and Lord of Hailes, will defend mine honour against all men, body for body, on foot or on horseback, at the barriers of the Portsburgh, between the chapel of St.

Mary and the castle rock, so help me God at the day of doom!"

And drawing off his long buff glove, which was richly embroidered and perfumed, the Earl handed it to his faithful Achates, and returned into the palace to have his train prepared with becoming splendour, for the honourable duty of guarding the queen on the morrow.

In compliance with this command, Black Hob, sheathed in his sable armour, his visor up to reveal his swarthy visage, and mounted on a strong charger of the jettiest black, attended by Hay of Tallo as esquire, French Paris as his page, and three trumpeters in the Earl's gorgeous livery, gules and argent, and having his banner, with the lions of Hepburn rending an English rose, advanced into the city, and there, amid a note of defiance, hung the Earl's glove above the fountain, together with his declaration of innocence, and offer "to decide the matter in a duel with any gentleman or person of honour who should dare to lay it to his charge."

For many a day the glove hung there, and none answered the challenge; for the star of Hepburn was still in the ascendant, and none dared to encounter its chieftain in the field, for dread of the deadly feud that was sure to ensue.

But the printer of pasquils and the caricaturists were still busy, and one morning there was a paper found beneath the Earl's challenge, on which was drawn a hand grasping a sword, and bearing the initials of the queen, opposed to another armed with a *maul*, bearing those of the Earl—a palpable allusion to the weapon by which the unfortunate prince was slain, and which could only have been made by a conspirator.

The heedlessness of the unsuspecting Mary in visiting the Earl of Winton under the escort of Bothwell (of whose innocence she had been convinced by Moray), and his divorce from his countess, lent renewed energy to the voice of calumny; and then those rumours of her participation in that crime, in which all the skill of her enemies for three hundred years has failed to involve her, were noised abroad; and slowly but surely the nation, which had never loved her for her catholicity and partiality for gaiety and splendour, was completely estranged from her. Now, on one hand, were a fierce people and a bigoted clergy; on the other, a ferocious vassalage, headed by illiterate and rapacious nobles, and to withstand them but one feeble woman,

In the glamour that came over the Scottish people, they failed to remember that, animated by delicacy and honour, the unhappy Mary, only six weeks before the death of Darnley, had rejected a divorce, though urged by the most able of her ministers and powerful of her nobles; they also forgot how anxiously she had prevented his committing himself to the dangers of the ocean, when about to become an exile in another land; and they forgot, too, her assiduity and tenderness, to one who had so long slighted and ceased to love her, when he lay almost upon a deathbed, under the effects of a loathsome and terrible disease. The nobles saw only a woman, who stood between them and power—regencies, places, and command; the people saw only an idolater and worshipper of stocks and stones; and the clergy “ane unseemly woman,” who dared to laugh, and sing, and dance, in defiance of their fulminations anent such sin and abomination.

Exasperated by his son's death and the rumours abroad, the aged Earl of Lennox demanded of Mary that Bothwell should submit to a trial. His prayer was granted; and Keith acquaints us that she wrote to her father-in-law, requesting him to attend the court with all his feudal power and strength.

Dreading the issue of an ordeal which might blast his prospects and his fame, the politic Bothwell used every means to increase his already vast retinue, by enlisting under his banner every dissolute fellow, border outlaw, and broken man that would assume his livery, the gules and argent; and thus his town residence, and those of his friends, were soon swarming with these sinister-eyed and dark-visaged swashbucklers, with their battered steel bonnets, their long swords, and important swagger. Thus, when the day of trial came, the streets were crowded with them; and when Bothwell, after passing through a long lane of his own arquebussiers, at the head of three thousand men (mostly barons, knights, and esquires,) appeared at the bar, sheathed in a magnificent suit of armour, supported on one side by the crafty Earl of Morton, and on the other by two able advocates—the father of the young prince he had destroyed dared not appear, as he dreaded to share the fate of his son.

After a long discussion, to which the high-born culprit listened with a beating heart—though his influence had packed the jury, which was composed of Mary's friends and Rizzio's mur-

derers; and though he had bribed the judges and deterred the prosecutor—the court, actuated by sentiments best known to themselves, unanimously “*acquitted*” the Earl of Bothwell of all participation in the king’s death.”

With him the die had been cast.

Had they brought in a verdict of guilty, another hour had seen his banner waving in triumph and defiance above the capital—for he was alike prepared to conquer or to die; but this decision of the jury, delivered by the mouth of Caithness, their chancellor, rendered all his warlike preparations nugatory. Had they found him guilty, he would boldly have rushed to arms in defence of his honour and life, with an energy and wrath that would alike have stifled the whispers of conscience and remorse; but they had declared him *innocent*, and he left the bar slowly and sadly, feeling in his inmost soul a thousand degrees more criminal than ever.

As he left the chamber where the High Court sat, his friends and vassals received him with acclamations—with brandished swords and waving pennons; and, with trumpets sounding, conveyed him through the great arch of the Netherbow to St. Mary’s Wynd, where, by his command, the host of the *Red Lion* had prepared a grand banquet and re-re-supper for the nobles and barons attending the Parliament.

Though “one of the handsomest men of his time,” as old Crawford tells us, the Earl feared that, notwithstanding the assiduity of his attentions, Mary would never regard him with other sentiments than those of mere esteem for his services, and efficiency as an officer of state. “Men stop at nothing when their hands are in,” saith an old saw; and, actuated by this spirit, Bothwell—ever keeping steadily in view that alluring object which, step by step, had drawn him to the dangerous and terrible eminence on which he found himself—resolved, by one more desperate act, to reach the summit of his hopes, or sink into the gulf for ever.

CHAPTER LVIII.

AINSLIE'S SUPPER.

It was, as we have stated, the month of April, and on the day of the Earl's acquittal.

About seven in the evening, the sun was setting behind the purple hills of the Ochil range, in all the splendour of that beautiful month of bright blue skies and opening flowers—of the pale primrose and the drooping blue-bell; when the dew lingers long on the fresh grass and the sprouting hedges—when the swallow builds its nest under the warm eave, and the mavis sings merrily as he spreads his pinions on the buoyant air.

It was an April evening. The rays of the setting sun had long since left the narrow streets of Edinburgh, though they still lingered on its gothic spires and gilded vanes, throwing a farewell gleam on each tall chimney head, each massy bartisan, and round tourelle.

A great fire blazed in the yawning hall chimney of the *Red Lion*, throwing its ruddy glow on the red ashler walls, which the host endeavoured to decorate by various pieces of tapestry, begged and borrowed from his neighbours, on the rough oak rafters that once had flourished on the burgh-muir—on the far-stretching vista of the sturdy table, flanked with wooden benches on each side for Bothwell's noble guests, covered with a scarlet broad cloth, and glittering in all the shiny splendour of French pewter and delft platters—for there had never been an atom of silver seen in an hostlery as yet; and by each dark-blue cover lay a knife, halfted with horn and shaped like a skene-dhu. A gigantic salt occupied the centre, and a carved chair raised upon a dais—a chair that whilome had held the portly Provost of St. Giles, but to which honest Adam had helped himself in 1559, that year of piety and plunder—stood at the upper end, and was designed for the great Earl of Bothwell.

A smile of the utmost satisfaction and complaisance spread over the fat rosy face of Ainslie's ample dame, as she surveyed the great table, which her taste and skill had decorated and arrayed; and she absolutely clapped her hands with glee, when the great platter, bearing a peacock roasted, and having its legs shining with gold-leaf, and all its bright-dyed pinions stuck

round it, was placed upon the board at the moment that a trampling of horses in the narrow wynd announced the arrival of the Earl and his guests, among whom were such a number of dignitaries as never before had been under the roof-tree of the *Red Lion*; and honest Elspat Ainslie was overwhelmed each time that she reckoned them on her fat fingers, and found there were eight bishops, nine earls, and seven barons, all the most powerful and popular in Scotland, where a man's power was then reckoned by the number of ruffians under his standard, and his popularity by his hatred of the Papists, and distribution of their gear to the preachers and pillars of the new regime.

The dame hurried to a mirror—gave her coif a last adjust—smoothed her apron and gown of crimson crammassie; while Adam brushed a speck from his fair doublet of broad cloth—practised his best bow several times to the gilt peacock; and all their trenchermen and attendants stood humbly by the door in double file as the guests entered.

Bothwell came first, with his usual air of gallantry and grace—his doublet of cloth-of-gold glittering in the light of the setting sun; his ruff buttoned by diamonds; his shoulder-belt and mantle stiff with gold embroidery; while his sword, dagger, and plumed bonnet, were flashing with precious stones. He made a profound bow to the hostess; for now he smiled less than formerly, and the pallor of his noble features was attributed by all to *grief* at the Lord Lennox's accusation.

Morton followed, looking quite as usual, with his sinister eyes, his long beard and little English hat, his black velvet cloak and silver-headed cane; but with a jocularly that was always affected, he pinched the plump cheek of Dame Ainslie, and thumped her husband upon the back, saying—

"How farest thou, host of mine? Faith, I need hardly ask thee, for thou swelldest and wallowest amid the good things of this life daily."

"By Tantony and Taudry! in these kittle times, my lord"—began Adam.

"Peace, thou irreverend ronion!" whispered the Earl of Huntly fiercely, as he grasped his poniard—"Saint Anthony and Saint Audry, thou meanest."

"I mean just whatever your lordship pleases," replied the hosteller, as he shrank abashed by the stern eye of the Catholic

noble, who resented every disrespect to the ancient church, so far as he dared.

"Nay, nay," interposed Secretary Maitland, with his bland smile and flute-like voice; "poor Adam's slip of the tongue merited not a rebuke so sharp; to grasp thy poniard thus amounts almost to hamesucken—a gloomy beginning to our banquet, my Lord of Huntly."

There was present that gay scion of the house of Guise, d'Elbœuff—all smiles and grimaces, starched lace and slashes; there was the Earl of Sutherland, the lover of Bothwell's absent countess; Glencairn, the ferocious; Cassilis, who once half-roasted an abbot alive; Eglinton, the cautious; Seaton, the gallant; and Herries, the loyal; Rosse, of Hawkhead, and many others—until the hall was crowded by the bravest and the greatest of Scotland's peers, and many lesser barons, who, though untitled, considered themselves in feudal dignity second to the crown alone. All were well armed, and the nature of the time was evinced by their dresses; for all who had not on corselets and gorgets to prevent sudden surprises, had quilted doublets of escaupil, and all were scrupulously accoutred with swords and Parmese poniards, without which no gentleman could walk abroad.

As Bothwell advanced to the head of the table to assume his seat, his eye caught one of the black-letter proclamations of the council, which was fixed over the gothic fire-place, and offered a yearly rent, with two thousand pounds of Scottish money, for the discovery of the perpetrators of the crime at the Kirk-of-Field; "quhilk horribill and mischevious deed," as the paper bore it, "almychty God would never suffer to lie hid."

"Mass!" said the Earl, as the blood mounted to his temples, "thou hast a roaring fire, Master Adam, this April day."

"The coals bleeze weel, Lord Earl; yet they cost a good penny, coming as they do by the galliots frae the knight of Carnock's heughs, aboon Culross."

"Little marvel is it that they burn thus," said the Earl of Glencairn; adding, in a lower voice, "for knowest thou, gude-man, that instead of contenting himself with such of this precious mineral as may be got shovel deep, by advice of that damnable sorcerer, the knight of Merchiston, he hath sunk a pit; a cylinder; even unto the bowels of the earth, as Hugh of Yester did at his Goblin Hall; and he is now digging under the Forth, with

intent, as Master George Buchanan told me yesterday, to ascend and seek upper air on this side?"

"Ascend!" reiterated Morton with astonishment—"Where?"

"At the gate of thy castle of Dalkeith, perhaps! thou art thought to dabble a little in spell and philtre; like draweth to like."

"As the deil said to the collier," added old Lindesay. Several laughed at the hit, but Morton frowned.

This famous supper at Ainslie's hostel; a supper which has been fated to live for ever in Scottish history; was marked by all that barbaric profusion that characterised the feasts of those days, when men feasted seldom. Under the superintendence of a notable French *chef de cuisine*, the first course consisted of ling, pike, haddocks, and gurnards, dressed with eggs, cream, and butter; but there was no salmon, that being esteemed as fitted only for servants. The chief dish of all was a grand pie of salt herrings, minced, and prepared with almond paste, milts, and dates; a grated manchet, sugar, sack, rose-water, and saffron; preserved gooseberries, barberries, currants, and Heaven knows what more; but the curious or the epicurean may still find the recipe in worthy Master Robert May's "*Accomplished Cooke*, 1685."

This delightful mess threw the Marquis d'Elbœuff into as great an ecstasy as the artificial hens, which formed part of the second course, and were made of puff-paste, seated upon large eggs of the same material, each of which contained a plump mavis, seasoned with pepper and ambergris; and, to him, these proved infinitely more attractive than the haunches of venison, the chine of beef, and roasted pigs, that loaded the table. To suit the palates of Lindesay, Glencairn, and other sturdy Scots, who disdained such foreign kickshaws, there were sottons of mutton, platters of pouts, Scottish collops, tailies of beef, and sea-fowl. Every description of French wine was to be had in abundance; ale and old Scots beer, seasoned with nutmeg; and it would have been a fair sight for the effeminate descendants of these doughty earls and bearded barons, to have witnessed how they did honour to this great repast, eating and drinking like men who rose with the lark and eagle, whose armour was seldom from their breasts, whose swords were never from their sides, and whose meals depended often on the dexterity with which they bent the bow, or levelled the arquebuss.

On each side of the Earl sat four bishops; and all his real and pretended friends were present except Moray, who had suddenly departed to France, "that he might seem to be unconcerned in what was going forward: he failed not in this journey to circulate every injurious report to the prejudice of his unhappy sovereign, who, in the meantime, was destitute of every faithful friend and proper councillor."

The Archbishop of St. Andrew's—the last Catholic primate of Scotland (the same noble prelate whom, for his loyalty, Moray so savagely hanged over Stirling bridge five years after)—now arose, and, stretching his hands over the board, uttered the brief grace then fashionable: "*Soli Deo honor et gloria*," whereat the Lord Lindesay muttered something under his beard, "anent the idolatry of Latin."

Instead of that calm, cold, and polite reserve, that marks the modern dinner table, their nut-brown faces shone with the broad good-humour that shook their buirdly frames with laughter, and they became boisterous and jocose as the night drew on; and the blood red wines of old France and Burgundy, and the stiff usquebaugh of their native hills, fired their hearts and heads.

Lord Lindesay had prevailed on d'Elbœuff to partake of a haggis, and he was laughing under his thick beard at the grimaces of the French noble, whose complaisance compelled him to sup a dish he abhorred.

"Thou findest it gude, Lord Marquis?"

"*Ah! c'est admirable!*" sighed d'Elbœuff.

"Why, thou seemest to relish it pretty much as a cat liketh mustard."

"*Oui!*" smiled the Frenchman, who did not understand him.

"And how fares my noble friend, Coldinghame?" asked the Earl of his brother *roué*.

"Weel enow; but sick of danging about this court, which is such a mess of intrigue."

"Tush! Bethink thee, the queen hath the wardship of many fair heiress, and may bestow on thee a handsome wife."

"Bah! like my lord of Morton, I care not for a handsome wife—"

"Unless she belong to another," said Ormiston, coarsely closing the sentence.

"By the rood! a good jest and a merry," laughed Bothwell; but Morton's olive cheek glowed with anger.

"Be not chafed, my lord," said Ormiston; "by cock and pie! I spoke but in boon fellowship. Drink with me! This Rochelle is famously spiced, and stirred with a rosemary sprig for good-luck."

"Does Master Ainslie warrant it old?"

"Old! my Lord Morton," reiterated Adam, turning up his eyes; "ay! auld as the three trees of Dysart; for it lay many a long year before the '59, among the stoor and cobwebs o' the Blackfriars' binns, up the brae yonder."

"By the way," said the Lord Coldinghame, "as thou talkest of the Blackfriars, what tale of a roasted horse is this, anent whilk the whole city is agog, concerning a spectre which is said to have appeared there on the night the king was slain, and hath haunted the ruins of St. Mary's kirk ever since?"

"Knowest thou aught of this, Adam?" asked Bothwell, whose mind, though he endeavoured to maintain his usual aspect of nonchalance, wandered constantly to the gigantic projects he had in view.

"As ye know, my lord," replied Adam, setting his head on one side and his left leg forward, with the air of a man who has a story to tell; "on the night of that deadly crime in the Kirk-of-Field, two especial gentlemen of the Earl of Athol, the umquhile king's gude-cousin, were both a-bed at his lordship's lodging, which is just within the town wall, and not a bowshot frae auld St. Mary's kirk. In the mirk mid hour of the night, Sir Dougal Stuart, who slept next the wall, was awaked by a death-cauld hand passing owre his cheek, and which thereafter took him by the beard, while an unearthly voice, sounding as if from afar off, said—'Arise, or violence will be offered unto you!' At the same moment his friend, a half-wud Hieland-man, awoke, saying furiously—'Where is my dirk, for some one hath boxed mine ear?' And both started up to see, close by their bed, a dusky figure, of which no feature could be defined save a clenched hand, bare, and long, and glistening in the siller moonlight, that shone through the grated window; then it melted away like morning mist; the turnpike door was heard to close with a bang, as if some one had left the house; and while, with fear and alarm, they started to their swords, lo!

they heard the explosion that sent king and kirk-house into the air together.”*

“Stuff and nonsense!” said Bothwell angrily, for this story was then current in the city; “’tis a tale befitting only the old dames who play basset and primero in the queen’s antechamber. Wert thou at sermon in the High Kirk this morning, Hob?” he asked, to change the subject.

“Cock and pie, no!” said Ormiston, as he gulped down his wine with surprise.

“Marry!” said Lord Lindesay; “thou didst miss a rare discourse.”

“On what did Master Knox expone?” asked several Protestant peers; while Huntly and other Catholics curled their moustaches, and exchanged glances of scorn. Lindesay replied—

“Anent the story of that strong loon, Samson, tying three hundred torches to the tails of sae mony tod-lowries, to burn the corn of the Philistines—likening himself unto Samson—the ministry o’ the reformat kirk to the three hundred tods, and their discourses unto the bleezing torches—the corn o’ the Philistines unto the kirk o’ the Pope, whilk their burning tails would utterly overthrow, ruinate, and consume. God speed the gude wark!” added the stern peer, as he brushed aside his heavy white beard with one hand, and tossed over his wine-cup with the other.

“What spell hath come over thee, compere Bothwell?” said d’Elbœuff; “thou seemest grave as a judge. Here is the *merry-thought* of a capercailzie to scare thy melancholy.”

“Marquis,” replied the Earl gaily, “thy wit would require the addition of a *wing* to make it soar. What a tall goblet thou hast! Dost mean to get drunk to-night?”

“Why not, *parbleu!* when I am to ride to Holyrood?”

“What difference doth that make?”

“*Mon Dieu!* because, if I stumble, there is more effect when falling from a saddle, then sprawling endlong in the kennel like a beastly bourgeoisie.”

“’Tis time with thee, Marquis, that siclike follies were left owre, for thy beard getteth frosted wi’ eild,” said Lord Lindesay.

“*Tete Dieu!* dost thou say so, and live? But remember,

* See Buchanan.

most sombre Lord of the Byres, that Paris is as different from this city as the fields of Elysium are from those on the other side of the Styx. There the gaieties and glories of youth begin when we are yet children; when ye are boys, we are men; when ye are in your prime, we are in old age—exhausted with pleasure, *ennui*, drinking and gaming, roistering and—”

“Enough, Marquis!” said Bothwell, who had two ends in view—to drench his guests with wine, and to keep them all in excellent humour. “Enough!” he whispered; “for there are some stern spirits here who do not relish this discourse; and bethink thee of the reverend bishops who are among us.”

“*Tonnere!* apostates! heretics!” muttered the Marquis. Meanwhile Ormiston, Bolton, Morton, and others who were Bothwell’s friends, seeing how his spirit alternately flagged and flashed, left nothing undone to increase the hilarity of the evening, and keep the wine circulating; for there were many present whom descent, religion, or faction had set at deadly feud, and who had they met on a hillside or highway, or perhaps in the adjacent street, would have fought like mad bulls; but these had been artfully and politicly separated, and thus the unrestrained jesting and revelry increased apace.

Some talked of creaghs upon the northern frontier, of forays on the southern, of partitions of kirk lands, and the flavour of wines, in the same breath. D’Elbœuff chattered like a magpie of new doublets and perfumes, of Paris and pretty women: old Lindesay spoke solemnly and portentously, over his ale, on the prospects of the holy kirk; and Glenclairn responded with becoming gravity and ferocity of aspect.

Morton sat opposite Lethington, and from time to time they sipped their wine and exchanged those deep glances which the most acute physiognomist would have failed to analyse; but, as they watched the ebb and flow of the conversation around them, Morton seemed almost to say in his eyes, “Thou art wise as Nestor;” and the secretary to reply, “And *thou* cunning as Ulysses.”

Gradually the latter led the conversation to the politics of the day—the misgovernment that, since the death of James V., had characterised each succeeding year; how the sceptre, feebly swayed by the hands of a facile woman, had never been capable of awing the great barons and their predatory vassalage—the urgent necessity of some powerful peer espousing the queen,

and assuming the reins of government, otherwise the destruction of Scotland by foreign invasion and domestic brawl—the subversion of the rights of the nobles, the power of the church, the courts of law, and the liberties of the people, would assuredly ensue.

This half-false and half-fustian speech, which the able Lethington delivered with singular emphasis and grace, was received with a burst of acclamation.

“My lords and gentles,” said the aged Lindesay, standing erect, and leaning on his six feet sword as he spake; “here we are convened, as it seemeth, as mickle for council as carousal; albeit, ye have heard the premises so suitably set forth by the knight of Lethington, it causeth me mickle marvel to know whom among us he would name as worthy of the high honour of espousing our fair Queen.”

“Cock and pie!” exclaimed the impetuous Hob Ormiston, erecting his gigantic figure, and speaking in a voice that made therafters ring; “whom would we name but her majesty’s prime favourite and sorely maligned first counsellor, James Earl of Bothwell, Governor of Edinburgh and Dunbar, and Lord High Admiral of the realm? Who, I demand, would not rather see him the mate of Mary Stuart, than the beardless lord of Darnley—that silken slave, that carpet knight, and long-legged giraffe in lace and taffeta? What say ye, my lords and barons, are we unanimous?”

There was a pause, and then rose a shout of applause, mingled with cries of “A Bothwell! a Bothwell!” from Morton and other allies of the Earl, who were so numerous that they completely overcame the scruples, or hushed into silence the objections, of the hostile and indifferent.

The Earl, whose heart was fired anew by the glow of love and ambition—for never did a prospect more dazzling open to the view of a subject than the hope of sharing a throne with a being so beautiful as Mary—thanked his friends with a grace peculiarly his own, and immediately produced that famous BOND—a document in which the nobles in parliament assembled, asserted his innocence of the crime of the 11th February, and earnestly recommended him to Mary as the most proper man in Scotland to espouse her in her widowhood—and bind themselves by every tie, human and divine, “to fortify the said Earl in the said marriage,” so runs the deed, “as we shall answer to God,

on our fidelity and conscience. And in case we do on the contrary, never to have reputation or credit in time hereafter, but to be accounted *unworthy and faithless traitors*."

"God temper thy wild ambition, Bothwell!" said the Archbishop, as he signed the document to which the seven other prelates appended their names. That of Moray—Mary's dearly loved brother—had *already* been given before his departure; and its appearance had a powerful effect on all present.

"Deil stick me, gif I like mickle to scald my neb in another man's brose!" growled Glencairn; "yet I will subscribe it, albeit I would rather have had a suitor to whose maintenance of the Holy Reformat Kirk Master Knox could have relied on."

Morton gave one of his cold and sinister smiles as he appended his name in silence; while the Marquis d'Elbœuff also smiled, shrugged his shoulders, and applied to his nostrils an exquisitely chased silver pouncet-box of fragrant essences, to conceal the merriment with which he watched the arduous operation of fixing the signatures; for writing was a slow and solemn process in those days.

A new and terrible difficulty occurred, which nearly knocked the whole affair on the head.

Very few of these potent peers could sign their names, and others objected to making their mark, which, from its resemblance to a *cross*, savoured of popery; but Lethington effected a conscientious compromise, by causing them to make a T, as those did who signed the first solemn league—a smallness of literary attainment which did not prevent those unlettered lords from demolishing the hierarchy of eight hundred years, and giving a new creed to a nation as ignorant as themselves.

Bothwell felt as if he trode on air when consigning this tremendous paper, which had the signatures of so many bishops, earls, and lords, the most powerful in Scotland, to the care of Pittendreich, the Lord President.

The rere-supper lasted long.

Deeply they drank that night, but none deeper than the Earl and his friends; and the morning sun was shining brightly into the narrow wynd—the city gates had been opened, and the booths which, from 1555 till 1817, clustered round St. Giles, were all unclosed for business, and carlins were brawling with the *acquaoli* at the Mile-end well, ere the company separated; and the Earl, accompanied by Hob Ormiston and the knights of

Tallo and Bolton, with their eyes half closed, their cloaks and ruffs awry, and their gait somewhat oscillating and unsteady, threaded their way down the sunlit Canongate, and reached Bothwell's apartments in Holyrood—that turreted palace, where the unconscious Mary was perhaps asleep with her child in her bosom, and little foreseeing the storm that was about to burst on her unhappy head.

CHAPTER LIX.

HANS AND KONRAD.

ON this morning, the sun shone brightly on the blue bosom of the Forth, and the grey rocks of all its many isles. The seamews were spreading their broad white pinions to the wind, as they skimmed from their nests in the ruins of Inchcolm, and the caves of Wemyss.

The little fisher-hamlet that bordered the New haven, with its thatched and gable-ended cottages, its street encumbered by great brown boats, rusty anchors, and drying nets, looked cheerful in the warm sunshine; and troops of ruddy-cheeked children were gamboling on those broad links that lay where now the water rolls.

Near a little window in the confined cabin of a Norwegian ship, lay Konrad of Saltzberg, faint, feeble, and exhausted; for the fever of a long and weary sickness had preyed upon his body and mind, prostrating every energy. He was pale, attenuated, and hollow-eyed; and now, for the first time since the night we last saw him, had emerged from insensibility to a state of consciousness. He felt the cool air of the April morning blow freshly on his pallid cheek; he heard the ripple of the water, and saw its surface gleaming in the sunshine afar off where its waves broke in purple and gold on a distant promontory; and close by (for the crayer lay within ten yards of the shore) he heard the merry voices of the children as they gamboled and tumbled on the bright green grass.

Konrad had been dreaming of his home, and these voices came to his slumbering ear in old familiar tones. He had heard the hearty greeting of old Sir Erick Rosenkrantz, and the merry laugh of Anna, as it had sounded in the days of his boyhood and

joy; and he heard the murmur of the sea, as wafted by the summer wind, its waves rolled upon the rocks of Bergen.

The morning breeze from the German ocean roused him from this dreamy lethargy, and for the first time in many weeks he raised his head, and endeavoured to recollect where he was; but the aspect of the little cabin, with its arched deck, and massive beams, confused and puzzled him.

"I am still dreaming," he murmured, and closed his eyes.

He opened them again, but still saw the same objects—the same little cabin, with its pannelled locker—a brass culverin on each side; a crossbow, maul, and helmet hanging on the bulkhead, and the open port affording a glimpse of the shining estuary, with its castled isle, and distant sails, that seemed like white birds resting on the faint and far-off horizon.

Steps were heard, and then a stout and thick-set man was seen slowly descending the ladder from the deck. First appeared a pair of broad feet encased in rough leather shoes—then two sturdy legs in brown stockings, gartered with red ribbons; a vast obesity clad in chocolate-coloured breeches, garnished with three dozen of metal knobs at the seams; a waist encircled by a belt, sustaining a Norway knife; then square bulky shoulders in a white woollen jacket, and then a great bullet head, covered by a cap of black fox's fur, under which, on the person turning round, appeared the moonlike face of honest Hans Knuber, open-mouthed and open-eyed—expressive only of good-humour and hilarity; and where not hidden by his thick red beard, exhibiting a hue that, by exposure to the weather, had turned to something between brick-dust and mahogany.

"Cheerily, ho!" said he, patting Konrad's shoulder with his broad hard hand; "and now, St. Olaus be praised, thou art come to life again! I knew the pure breeze that blew right over the sea from old Norway would revive thee."

"Honest Hans," replied Konrad, in a feeble voice, "I have often heard thy deep tones in the dreams of my sleep, as I thought."

"And so thou wert in a dream, lad—and a plaguy long one! such a dream as the wood-demon used to weave about those who dared to take a nap under his oak. Asleep! why, lad, thou'st been delirious—"

"How! since I came on board thy ship last night, in a plight so pitiful?"

"St. Olaus bless thee, Master Konrad! Thou hast lain by that gun-port for these eight long weeks!"

"Weeks—weeks!" muttered Konrad, pressing his hands on his temples, and endeavouring in vain to recollect himself.

"Ay, weeks; and a sad time we have had of it, with leeching and lancing, drugging and dosing, plastering and patching. Mass! I thought thou would have slipped thy cables altogether, though under the hands of Maitre Picauet." For Hans had spared no expense, and had brought even the royal physician to see his young charge; and so, thanks to the same skill that brought James VI. into the world, and nearly recovered Darnley from the grave, Konrad, when the delirium left him, began to find himself a new man.

"Eight weeks! I remember me now. Thou hadst landed thy cargo of Norway deals from our old pine-woods of Aggerhuis—hazel cuts and harrowbills—"

"Ay, ay; and had stowed on board my new lading, being crammed to the hatches with tanned leather, earthenware, and Scottish beer, wheat and malt, for which I expect to realise a goodly sum in round dollars among the cities on the Sound, where I would long since have furled my topsails, but for a rascally English pirate that hath cruised off the mouth of the fiord (or frith as the Scots call it), and I dared not put to sea, though ready to sail, with the free coquet of the queen's conservator in my pouch, and my ship hove short upon her cable; for this is my last venture, and under hatches I carry all that must make or mar for ever the fortune of old Hans Knuber."

"Thou didst tell me some news from old Norway, I now remember, on that night Earl Bothwell's page led me here."

"Why, thou wert like the spectre of a drowned man—St. Erick be with us! But here—drain thy cup of barley ptisan, and I will tell thee more in good time."

Konrad drank the decoction prescribed by the physician, and impatiently said—

"Thou sawest my good friend, the old knight Rosenkrantz, I warrant?"

"I did," replied Hans gravely.

"And how looked he?"

"Stiff enow, Master Konrad; for he was lying in his coffin, with his spurs on his heels, and his sword girt about him."

Konrad was thunderstruck, and barely able to articulate ; he gazed inquiringly at Hans.

"True it is, this sad story," said the seaman, wiping a tear away with the back of his brawny hand ; "thou knowest well how all the province loved the bluff old knight, who was never without a smile or a kind word for the humblest among us ; and faith, he never allowed old Hans Knuber to pass his hall door without putting a long horn of dricka under his belt. But Sir Erick is gone now, and the king's castle of Bergen (ah ! thou rememberest *that*) is a desolate place enough. And honest Sueno Thronson, that most puffy and important of chamberlains, he is gone to his last home too. He went to Zeeland in the ship of Jans Thorson, to hang Sir Erick's shield, with all his arms fairly emblazoned thereon, among those of other dead Knights of the Elephant, in the subterranean chapel of Fredericksborg ; but Jans, as thou knowest, could never keep a good reckoning, and, by not allowing duly for variation and lee-way, was sucked by the moskenstrom, with all his crew, right down into the bowels of the earth. Saint Olaus sain them !"

"Poor Sir Erick !" said Konrad, heedless of the fate of Jans, while his tears fell fast.

"Dost thou not know that King Frederick had created him Count of Bergen, and Lord of Welsöo, for his services in the old Holstein war?"

"Of all these passages, I have heard nothing."

"His niece, the Lady Anna, will be a countess now, as well as the richest heiress in the kingdom. Baggage that she is ! Her uncle never recovered her desertion of his home for the arms of that Scottish lord, whom, if I had him here, I would string up to my gaff peak. By the mass ! the old knight's heart was broken, for he loved thee as a son, and Anna as a daughter ; but to the devil say I with women, for they all yaw in their course somehow, and require a strong hand at the tiller, to make them lie well to the wind. This Anna, God's murrain—"

"Hold thee, Hans Knuber," said Konrad, with something of his old air of dignity and authority ; "for, nevertheless all thy kindness, I will not permit thee to breathe one word that is ungracious of Anna."

"As thou pleasest, lad," replied the seaman, taking off his fur cap to wipe his capacious head ; "I thought 'twould relieve

thee somewhat to hear one who had so shamefully misused thee roundly cursed."

"Oh no! never! replied the young man in a low voice; "Oh, Hans! thou knowest not the depth and the enthusiasm of this passion that hath bewitched me. It banishes every angry thought from my mind, and leaves only a sense of desolation and agony, that can never die but with myself."

"Now, by the bones of Ludbrog! but I have no patience with this. How! a bold fellow like thee to be caterwauling thus, like a cat on a gutter? Go to! The Lubeckers and Holsteiners are again displaying their banners on the Elbe and Weser. Assume thy sword and helmet again. Thou hast the world before thee, with a fair wind; and what matters it leaving a false woman and a slighted love behind? Cheerily, ho! Master Konrad; a love that is easily won is lightly lost."

"False as this girl has been to me, Hans, there are times when her bright smile and her winning voice, and all the memory of our happy early days, come back to me in their first freshness and joy, and my soul melts within me. *Then*, Hans—in moments like these—I feel that, were she repentant, I could love her as of old. Oh, yes! I could forgive her—I could press her to my breast, and worship her as I did even in those days that have passed to return no more."

"Well, well—as thou pleasest. Take another gulp of this barley drench—thy ptisan. Get strong and healthy ere we see old Norway, where she is gone before thee with Christian Alborg, in the Biormen, and who knoweth what the clouds of futurity may conceal? An old love is easily rekindled, I have heard, though, by the mass! I know little of such gear; though *this* I know, that the castle of Bergen, with the young countess's lordship of Welsöö, would make a very snug roadstead to drop one's anchor in;" and, with a leering wink, Hans Knüver once more clambered to the upper deck, where he drew his fur cap over his bushy brows, thrust his hands into his pockets, and scowled defiance at the small white speck that, near the Isle of May, still marked where the English pirate lay cruising in the offing.

CHAPTER LX.

HOW BOTHWELL MADE USE OF THE BOND.

It was the 23rd of April, four days after the great supper described in chapter ninth, when the Queen, without her guard of archers, and accompanied only by a slender retinue, passed along the Stirling road towards Edinburgh. She was mounted on her celebrated white palfrey, with its bridle and housings covered with silver bosses and elaborate embroidery; and with surpassing grace she managed it, the stately animal bowing its arched neck, and champing the burnished bit, as if proud of its beautiful rider.

Mary wore a long and flowing riding-habit of dark cloth, laced with silver about the neck and sleeves. It came close up to her dimpled chin, where a thick frill, or little ruff, stuck stiffly out all round. She had her glossy hair drawn back from her snow-white temples, under her lace cap of widowhood (the far-famed Queen Mary cap), that drooped over her brow, while cocked jauntily a little on one side, she wore one of those small sugar-loaf hats which were then so fashionable. A diamond band encircled it, and a veil of the richest lace danced from it in the evening wind, as she caricoled along the old narrow horse-way that wound among the fields near the ancient manor of Sauchton.

She was accompanied by only five attendants, among whom were Huntly, Lethington the secretary, and Sir James Melville of Halhill. With her colour brightened by the exercise of riding, and her eyes sparkling with animation and pleasure, (for she had just been paying a visit to the infant prince at Stirling—a visit fated to be her last,) when her veil was wafted aside, Mary's face seemed to glow with a beauty and vivacity to which her smart beaver hat lent additional piquancy; and she conversed with more than her usual gaiety and thoughtlessness to the politic Melville, the subtle secretary, and their better man, the stately young chieftain of the house of Gordon. On her wrist sat the gift of her father's aged falconer, (James Lindsay of Westschaw,) one of those beautiful falcons which made their eyery in a perpendicular rock on the West-hill of Alva, where, says the Magister Absalom, never more than *one* pair have been known to build a nest, even unto this time.

The day was serene! the sun was verging westward, and large masses of shadow lay deepening on the Pentland hills, while the bright flush of the sunlight beamed upon their steep acclivities and heather-brows with a golden tint. The sky was cloudless, and the whole of that magnificent plain, which spreads from the western gates of Edinburgh to those of Glasgow, was clad in all the rural beauty of an early summer. Warmed by the April showers, the trees were putting forth their greenest leaves, and the pink foxglove and blue-bells were bordering the highway; while the wildbrier, the mountain thyme, and the rose of Gueldres, filled the air with perfume.

"Oh, joy! how beautiful!" said Mary, as she checked her palfrey on the high and ancient bridge that crossed the Leith near the old baronial manor of the Elphinstones, whose broad dark chimneys were seen peeping above a grove of beeches. "See! yonder is the town, with its castle and St. Giles' spire shining blood-red in the light of the sunset, above the bright green copsewood. And look, Monsieur Huntly, what a delightful little cottage by the side of that river! The green ivy, the wild roses, and the woodbine, are all clambering about its thatched roof—nothing is visible but its little door. Ah, Jane, *ma bonne!*" she exclaimed to her sister Argyle, "how I should love to live there, with nothing to attend to but my flowers and music, and a nice little cow to milk."

"I fear your majesty would soon be *ennuëyed* to death, and longing for Holyrood, with its floors of oak and walls of velvet tapestry, with your archers at the gate and pages in the corridor," replied the grave Lethington, with a smile of something between amusement and sarcasm at the simplicity of the young queen.

At the cottage door an old woman was sprinkling water on a herd of cattle, with broom dipped from time to time in a tub, at the bottom of which lay a perforated stone, which was deemed a sovereign remedy against all witchcraft; but, suddenly ceasing her employment, she curtsied lowly to the lady, of whose exalted rank she was ignorant.

The scenery was very fine, for the country was then more thickly wooded almost than now, and afar off shone the rugged outline of Edinburgh, rearing up on its ridgy hills, with the great square spire of its cathedral, and the lofty towers and bastel-houses of its castle, clustering on lofty and perpendicular rocks. Close by the road, arose the double peaks of Craiglock-

hart; one covered with pastures of emerald green, the other bluff with whin-tufted basalt, and crowned with gloomy firs; while, following its winding and devious course, the Leith brawled and gurgled over its pebbled bed. Brightly the sunlight danced upon the dimpled water; already in blossom, the lilac groves that shaded it were filling the air with fragrance; their white and purple flowers being at times relieved by the pale green of the willow, the golden laburnum, and the pink cups of the wild-roses; while every flower and blade of grass were glittering in the early dew of the April evening. Unseen, amid the thick foliage that bordered the highway, a thousand birds were filling the air with a melody, that died away even as the sun's rays died upon the distant hills, and the saffron glow of the west assumed the sombre tint of the gloaming.

The young Highland earl, who rode by Mary's side, was charmed with her vivacity, and conversed with her alone; while the more phlegmatic Lethington and Melville jogged together a few paces behind, very intent on their own intrigues and correspondence with Elizabeth of England, with Cecil, and with Killigrew; both of whom, though able statesmen and subtle politicians, will be found, if tried by the rules of justice and honour, the greatest villains that ever breathed. The beauty of the scenery, and the buoyancy of the air, raised Mary's vivacity, and increased her brilliant wit; and she often made the thickets echo with her musical laugh, or a verse of a merry French song; till a sudden turn of the road brought them full in view of a sight that made her utter a faint cry of alarm, rein up her palfrey with one hand, and with the other grasp the arm of Huntly, who instantly drew his sword.

Right across that narrow path was drawn up the imposing line of a thousand horsemen in close array, all sheathed in armour, with the points of their uplifted lances, their breast-plates, and conical helmets, glittering in the setting sun. Their flanks, which extended into the fields on each side, were well thrown forward, so as completely to encircle the terrified queen and her little retinue. A few yards in front were two knights with their visors up; one bore a standard displaying two Scottish lions rending a red rose, and by his sable armour, his negro-like visage, and colossal frame, all recognised Hob of Ormiston; but in the other, whose light suit of mail, engrained with gold, was white as winter frost, and reached only to the knees of his scar-

let hose, they knew the Earl of Bothwell. He leaped from his horse, and, drawing off his right gauntlet, advanced reverentially towards the queen on foot.

"What foul treason is meditated here?" asked Huntly sternly, as the Earl passed him.

"None; but thou shalt see," replied the other with a smile, "that I will now wed the queen—yea, *whether she will or not!*"*

"Now by my father's soul!" began Huntly furiously.

"How!" said Secretary Lethington, with one of his cold and placid smiles; "has your lordship already forgotten the supper, and the *bond?*"

"Jesu Maria!" muttered Huntly; "I foresaw not this!"

"Your grace will hold me excused," said the Earl of Bothwell, grasping the bridle of Mary's palfrey; "but your own safety and the commonweal require that I should, without a moment's delay, lead you to my castle of Dunbar."

"Mother of God! How—why?" asked Mary in an agitated voice, as she gazed on the face of the Earl, which was pale as death; for the magnitude of the crime he contemplated, had for a moment appalled even himself. "With what am I menaced? Is there a raid among the Lennox men—an invasion of the English—or what? Who is my enemy?"

"James of Bothwell, as this sword shall prove!" exclaimed the young Earl of Huntly, making a furious blow at the noble's tempered helmet—a blow that must have cloven him to the chin, had not Bolton and Hob Ormiston crossed their lances, and interfered with the speed of light; but Hob's tough ash standard pole was cut in two.

"Mass!" he exclaimed; "now hold thee, Earl Huntly, or, with my jeddart staff, I will deal thee a dirl on the crown that will hang a scutcheon on the gate of castle Gordon for the next year."

The horsemen closed up with level lances, and the gentlemen of the queen's train were immediately disarmed.

"To Dunbar! to Dunbar!" cried Bothwell, leaping on horseback, but still retaining the queen's bridle.

"For what end, Lord Earl, and for what purpose, am I to be thus escorted, or made captive, I know not which? Tell me, I implore—nay, I demand of thee as my liegeman and vassal?"

* See Melville.

"I refer your majesty to my *advisers* here present, to the Earl of Huntly and the Knight of Lethington; but fear not, dearest madam, for I am devoted to you in body and in soul, and I swear to you by the four blessed gospels, that I have only your weal at heart. Oh, come with me—come without resistance; for resistance would be vain!"

"Darest thou to say so?"

"Pardon me; but once within the gates of Dunbar, that stately castle with which thou didst so graciously gift me, I will tell thee all. On, on—knights and horsemen! for the night is closing fast, and I can foresee that, natheless the beauty of this April eve, we shall have a storm of no common potency."

Mary's pride, which never for a moment deserted her, impelled resistance; her dark eyes filled with fire; she grew very pale; her beautiful mouth expressed all the scorn and anger that swelled up in her breast, and she endeavoured to snatch her bridle from the hand of the Earl; but at that moment the soft persuasive voice of Secretary Maitland addressed her, and his hand touched her arm lightly. He spoke in an under tone, and what he said was unheard by the Earl; but his wily eloquence was never exercised in vain, and that tact which bent the most stubborn nobles to his purpose, was not likely to prove ineffectual upon the too facile and gentle Mary.

"Be it so!" she replied with hauteur. "*De tout mon cœur!* I will bide my time; but, Sir William of Lethington, if this raid should prove as my mind misgiveth me, by every blessed saint my vengeance will be terrible!"

The cold statesman bowed with one of his inexplicable smiles as he reined back his horse; and then, by the command of Bothwell, the whole train set forward at a furious pace, which the Earl had no wish to diminish, for the double purpose of avoiding the alternate questions, threats, and intreaties of the queen, and escaping the fury of a sudden storm, that, with singular rapidity, had converted that beautiful evening into one of darkness and gloom.

Agitated, by turns, with astonishment, vexation, indignation, and fear, the queen rode on, reserving her inquiries till they should reach Dunbar.

But why to Dunbar, and not to Holyrood?

A thousand terrors and fancies flitted across her mind. Perhaps the principal nobles had again leagued to slay her, as they

had done when her brother rose in rebellion ; perhaps he was again in arms, with Lindesay, Glencairn, and all the furious upholders of that new doctrine, which she openly feared and secretly abhorred.

The clank of a thousand suits of armour, and the rush of four times that number of galloping hoofs on the hard dusty road, stunned and confused her ; while the figures of the mail-clad riders, their tall lances, and Bothwell's rustling banner, the hills and copsewood that overhung their way, grew darker and duskier as the sky became veiled by the heavy clouds that came up in masses from the German sea.

The summits of the mountains were veiled in descending mist ; the air became close and still, and far off the broad red gleams of the sheet lightning brightened in the sky, revealing in bold outline the ridges of the distant hills, and the waving woods that crowned their summits.

Edinburgh, with its walls and gates, was left behind in night and obscurity ; the marshes of Restalrig, where every moment their chargers floundered to the girths ; the dreary Figgate whins, where every pace was encumbered with roots and other remains of an old primeval forest ; and the ruined chapel of Mary Magdalene—were passed ; and the captive queen, with her escort, were galloping along that far expanse of sandy beach, where the white-crested waves rolled with a sullen boom on the desert shore.

Now the clanging hoofs rang like thunder on the broad flagged pavement of the ancient Roman way, that led directly over the picturesque old bridge built by the soldiers of Agricola, and where a strong iron gate, erected transversely across the centre arch, closed the passage after nightfall. But a blast from Ormiston's bugle-horn summoned the gateway, cowering and shivering from his seat by the ingle ; for now, from the darkened sky, the heavy rain was pattering upon the hurrying river. At the imperious command, to "make way for the Lord Earl of Bothwell !" the barrier was instantly unelosed, and on swept the train in all its military show, each horseman stooping his helmeted head, and lowering the point of his long Scottish spear, as he passed under the low-browed gate, and wheeled to the left, by the base of the mound, where still the Roman trenches lay, as strong and as visible as when the cohorts of the empire raised there a temple to "Apollo, the long-haired."

Then Musselburgh, the chapel of Loretto, with its demolished tombs and desecrated shrines, old Pinkiecleugh, with its woods and tower, where Abbot Durie dwelt, were left behind, and once more the train was sweeping along the echoing shore, by the margin of the midnight sea—with the thunder rumbling among the hills, and the rain and the storm adding spurs to their headlong speed. By midnight they reined up before the castle of Dunbar, where broad and vast, in all their ancient strength and feudal pride, the strong round towers of Bothwell's princely dwelling stood in clusters on the sea-beaten rocks.

Despite the darkness of the night, and the fury of the storm, which was pouring the German sea in waves of snow-white foam against the castle cliffs, the roar of three salvoes of brass culverins from the lower battlements, burst like peals of thunder on the air; while, red and forky, the flashes shot forth between the strong embrasures and deep-mouthed gun-ports of curtain-wall and flanking-tower, as the drawbridge fell, the portcullis ascended, and the glare of twenty blazing torches flashed under its iron teeth, displaying a court-yard crowded with the Earl's retainers in jack and morion, his servitors in livery, and pages glittering in lace and embroidery, grouped beneath the strong-ribbed archway to receive the queen.

Somewhat assured by this display of loyalty, respect, and security, the queen permitted Bothwell to kiss her hand as he assisted her to alight, and led her half sinking from fatigue to the hall, where everything appeared as if prepared for her reception; for, thanks to the forethought of Hob of Ormiston, nothing was ever wanting to complete those dangerous dramas in which the Earl was now the leading actor; and, by his contrivance, while the Earl led Mary up the great staircase, French Paris conducted Sir James Melville and the other gentlemen of her retinue to a detached tower, where some of his vassals guarded them till daybreak, when they were expelled from the castle, the gates closed, and they were left (as Sir James tells us in his memoirs) somewhat unceremoniously to shift for themselves, and to bear to Edinburgh and its astonished citizens, the tidings of Bothwell's daring and the queen's captivity.

CHAPTER LXI.

LOVE AND SCORN.

THOUGH the ardour of Bothwell's daring and ambitious passion for Mary was increased almost to a frenzy, on finding her completely in his power, within the strong gates and stronger walls of that magnificent fortress, of which, in an unfortunate moment of liberality, she had made him governor; he felt his courage sink when the moment came for revealing the bond of the nobles, the hopes he had cherished, and the deed of which he had been guilty.

Three great chandeliers of wax candles, which hung from the arched roof of the lofty hall, shed a blaze of light upon the gobeline tapestry that covered its walls, from the base to the spring of the vault, which was profusely decorated with the richest fresco work, where the royal cipher and the *fleur-de-lys* were prominently seen. Four gothic pillars sustained the carved arch of the fireplace, where an enormous grate, standing on four knobs of brass, was filled with blazing coal. The floor was covered with thick rush matting; and a magnificent collation of fruit, confections, and dainties, in baskets of chased silver, flasks of crystal, and jasper vases, were laid upon the tables by French Paris, little Calder, and other attendants.

Meanwhile the storm continued with unabated fury without; with the noise of thunder the ocean dashed against the bluffs on which the castle stood, and roared in the far recesses of those deep caverns that perforate its cliffs of dark red basalt. The rain poured like a cataract against the barred windows, and hissed in the wide chimney; the mournful cry of the solan goose, and the shriek of the seamew, were heard on the passing wind, as it dashed them with the surf against the castle walls; and the streaming of the wax lights, and undulations of the tapestry within, increased the dreary effect of the tempest without; and its fury seemed the greater, from very contrast with the beautiful evening which had preceded it.

The Earl, like other men of his time, was not without a tinge of superstition; and the storm contributed greatly to increase his irresolution.

"Being at Dunbar," says Mary in one of her letters, "we

reproached him with the favour we had always shown him—his ingratitude, and all other remonstrances that might serve to release us out of his hands; albeit we found his doings rude, yet his words and answers were gentle, that he would honour and serve us. He asked pardon for the boldness of conveying us to one of our own houses, constrained by love, the vehemence of which made him set apart the reverence which naturally he bore us as our subject, as also the safety of his own life.”

Thus far the artless Mary; but the papers of the worthy Magister Absalom Beyer are more full in their details.

Pale from the hurry of the journey, and the current of her own thoughts, Mary stood in the centre of the hall, divested of her hat and riding-habit, which had been drenched by rain. Her plain but rich dress of black satin fell in deep and shining folds around her figure, but presented nothing to indicate her rank; for, save her amber beads, her gold crucifix, and celebrated diamond ring, she was without other ornament than her own bright auburn hair. In some degree damp and disordered, it fell in heavy braids upon her neck, which, on her ruff being removed, contrasted by its delicate whiteness with her black satin dress.

Bothwell had hurriedly thrown aside his wet armour, and assumed a manteau, or robe of scarlet, which was trimmed with ermine, and usually worn by knights upon state occasions; and it lent additional dignity to his towering figure, as, with a beating heart, he approached Mary, and welcomed her to the castle of Dunbar.

Her eyes were full of inquiry, and her mouth, half-opened, displayed all her beautiful teeth; and Bothwell, dazzled and intoxicated, dreaded only that his own eyes might too soon reveal the passion which now, when he gazed upon its object, made every scruple to vanish.

“And now, Lord Earl,” said the Queen gravely, but with a slight tinge of her usual playfulness, “for what have we had this terrible ride to Dunbar, passing in our hurry even the gates of our own palace and capital? Now, say—for what didst thou bring me here?”

“To say, madam, that I love you with other sentiments than those a subject bears a sovereign,” replied the Earl, as he pressed her hand to his heart, for at the end of that vast hall they were almost alone. “Oh! thou too winning Mary,” he added, in his

low and most persuasive tones ; “ I have long adored thee, and with a love surpassing that of men.”

Starting back a pace, the Queen withdrew her hand ; her brow crimsoned, and her flashing eyes were firmly bent on Bothwell.

“ Lord Earl,” she replied, in a voice that trembled between anger and dread, “ what is this thou hast dared to do ? ”

“ To love thee—is it a crime ? ”

“ No, if it be such love as I may receive ; but such is not thine, Lord Earl.”

“ Oh ! visionary that I have been ! ” exclaimed the astonished noble, as he clasped his hands ; “ and to a dream have I given up my soul, my peace, my honour ! Oh, madam ! shew me some way in which I may yet farther prove the ardour of this passion, of which thou art the idol ! Give me sufferings to be borne—difficulties to surmount—dangers to encounter ; shew me battles to fight and fortresses to storm. Didst thou wish it, I would invade England to-morrow, and carry fire and sword even to the gates of York ; for five hundred knights and ten thousand horsemen follow my banner.”

“ *Je vous remercie !* ” exclaimed Mary, with irony, as she turned away—“ I thank thee, Lord Earl ; but ere I go to war with my good cousin Elizabeth, I must punish my rebels at home.”

“ Oh, madam ! thou, to win whose love I have dared so much—thou, the object of my boyish dreams and manhood’s bold ambition—towards whom I have ever been borne by an irresistible and inevitable tide—the sure, dark current of fatality—hear me ? But look not upon me thus, for an aspect so stony will wither my heart.”

“ Lord Bothwell,” replied the Queen gravely ; “ thou deceivest thyself with a volume of sounding words, but seek not to delude me, too. Till morning, I will rest me in this, my castle of Dunbar ; and to-morrow in Holyrood will seek a sure vengeance for the raid of to-night.”

“ Sayest thou so, madam ? ” replied the Earl, whose proud heart fired for a moment at her scorn ; “ then thine will be the greater remorse.”

“ Remorse ? *mon Dieu !* ” said Mary, laughing.

“ Ah, madam ! why didst thou encourage me to love thee ? ”

“ I encourage you ! ” reiterated the Queen with astonishment.

“ Mother Mary ! thou ravest. Never ! never ! I needed not to encourage men to love me.”

"Thou didst so to me, madam. By God's death ! thou didst ; and it was cruel to inspire me with a passion which thou couldst not return."

"Thou hast mistaken my too affable manner," replied the Queen ; "but I will not stoop to defend myself before thee, presumptuous vassal !"

Bothwell's spirit now fell as the Queen's rose ; for he felt certain that, should she continue in this mood, he was lost.

Ambition and policy supplied him with that cloquence, of which, perhaps, the excess of his romantic passion might have deprived him ; and his voice, ever persuasive and seductive, poured all his practised blandishments like a flood upon her ear. Borne away by the tide of feeling, he painted his torments, his ardour, his long-treasured love, his stifled despair ; and Mary listened with pity and interest, for her heart was the gentlest of the gentle ; and she saw in him a handsome and gallant noble, who had drawn his sword in her service when a whole peerage held aloof—who had shed his blood to uphold her authority—and who had lately suffered deeply (so she thought) by the mere malevolence of his enemies ; but not one glance even of kindness would she bestow upon him.

Even the bond signed by those reverend prelates, whom she almost worshipped—those powerful peers, whom she sometimes respected, but more often feared—and that politic brother, whom she had ever loved better than herself—even that document was urged upon her in vain. It served but to increase her anger, and she told Bothwell she "could never, never love him !"

"Madam, madam, repulse me not ! Oh, thou knowest not how long, how deeply I have loved thee !"

"Summon my attendants ! This night I will rest me here ; but," she added threateningly, "to-morrow is a new day ; and thou, Lord Earl, mayest tremble when I leave Dunbar !"

"Madam," replied the Earl proudly, but sadly, "from the hour my eyes first opened on the light, I have never trembled ; and now I swear to thee, by the joys of heaven and the terrors of hell, thou shalt NEVER leave Dunbar but as the bride of Bothwell !"

And turning, he retired abruptly.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE CRY.

THAT night, in his private apartment, Bothwell drank deeply with Ormiston and Bolton.

The storm still raged without ; the dash of the waves on the bluffs, their clangour in the caverns below, and the mournful moaning of the wind as it swept round the battlements above, were heard incessantly ; but the fire burned merrily on the broad flagged hearth ; the hounds yawned lazily as they stretched themselves before it ; a supper of mutton sottens, broiled capon, a solan goose, and pout-pie, lay untouched on a buffet, which two oak wyverns upheld on their outspread wings.

The bright wines of Rochelle and Bordeaux sparkled as they were poured from great Flemish jugs into the elaborately-chased silver maizers, from which the Earl and his friends were drinking—and drinking, as we have said, deeply ; Bolton, to drown the memory of a deed that was likely to drive him distracted ; Bothwell, to obtain nerve for whatever might ensue ; and Hob Ormiston, to please himself, and keep them company. After a pause—

“Courage, brave Bothwell !” he exclaimed, striking the Earl on the shoulder ; “for thou seemest the chosen son of the fickle little goddess.”

“Fortune has been smiling on me of late ; but, as I have told thee, I begin to scorn her favour since the rejection of my suit by Mary.”

“All coy reluctance. By St. Anthony’s pig ! were I thou—”

“Nay, nay ! Mary is above acting so childishly. But wert thou me, what then ?”

“By cock and pie ! I would make her mine ere the sun rises from the sea to-morrow.”

“Peace !” said the Earl, through whose heart there thrilled a fierce and sudden joy as Ormiston spoke.

“Take courage ; for the same day that sees thee Duke of Orkney and Regent of Scotland beholds me Earl of Ormiston and Marquis of Teviotdale ; and by Tantony’s bell and bones, and pig to boot ! the sooner the better, say I, for every rood of my barony, main and milne, holm and haugh, are mortgaged to

the chin among the rascally notaries and usurers of Edinburgh, whom the devil confound! What sayest thou, Bolton? Sorrow take him! he is drunk and asleep. Poor fool! he hath never been himself since *that* night. Hearken," continued this ruffian, approaching the Earl, whom it was his interest to urge yet further on that desperate course in which they had embarked together; "doth not the Queen and her sister, the Lady Argyle, sleep in the chambers of the Agnes tower?"

"Yes; so sayeth Sandy of Whitelaw, my seneschal. The Queen is in the vaulted chamber on the first floor; Jane of Argyle above."

"Well!" said Ormiston, fixing his keen dark eyes on those of the Earl.

"*Well?*" reiterated the Earl.

"It is folly to pause midway in the career of ambition; and it lies with thyself to make this woman thine; for what is she but a pretty woman after all? It lieth with thyself, I say, to make her thine, to end her scruples, and to close for ever the web thou hast woven around her."

"Silence!" said the Earl, rising abruptly, but immediately reseating himself; "silence! thy villanous counsels will destroy me."

"Destroy thee!" reiterated Ormiston. "Nay; but thy faintness of heart will now, at the eleventh hour, destroy all those who follow thy banner by knight's service and captainrie; by fear of Chatelherault and hatred of Lennox. Let Mary once be thine, and she dare not punish, but rather, for the reparation of her own honour, will be compelled to wed thee. Think of her alluring loveliness! and to be so near thee—so completely in thy power! Hah! art thou a child—a love-sick frightened boy—to sit there with that lackadaisy visage, when the woman thou lovest so madly is almost within arm's length? Go to! What a miserable thing is this! to see a strong and proud man the slave of a passion such as thine—a love so wild, so daring, so misdirected; his heart and soul absorbed by a wayward woman, who perhaps secretly prizes, though she outwardly affects to despise, the acquisition."

"Silence, I tell thee!" replied the Earl through his clenched teeth; but Ormiston saw, by the deep flush in his cheek—by the light that sparkled in his eye, and the tremour that passed over his frame, how deep was the impression his words had made.

"Dost thou recoil? By St. Paul! the safety of thine own house, and that of many a gallant baron, depends on the measures of this night; for to-morrow she will leave Dunbar only to return with the royal banner and all the crown vassals at her back. Take another maizer of the Rochelle, while I leave thee to ponder over what I have said, for the night wears apace."

"Begone, in God's name! and take Bolton with thee, for I would be alone."

The powerful Ormiston bore away the lieutenant of the archers as if he had been a child, and the Earl was left to his own reflections.

"He is right—he is right! To hesitate is to fall—delay is fraught with danger; and to pause, is to be immediately overwhelmed by the recoil of that fatality of which I have taken the lead. But—but—curse thee, Ormiston! why did I listen to thee?"

He drank—again and again—to deaden alike the stings of conscience and the whispers of honour—to fire yet farther his insane passion, and to make as it were, a tool of himself.

"Revenge!" he mused, "revenge and ambition spur me on, till the dread of death and the ties of honour are alike forgotten. How irresistible has been the fatality that has led me on, from what I was to what I am to-night—a regicide! a traitor! Let me not think of it; still—still, on this hand I glut my revenge on Morton and on Mar; on the other, I grasp love and power like a kingly orb. It shall be so!" he exclaimed, after a pause; "this night I am not myself—the hand of Destiny is upon me."

He leaped from his chair, and threw off his ermined manteau; exchanged his boots for soft taffeta slippers; he laid aside the sword and belt that girt his powerful figure; he took his sheathed poniard in one hand, a lighted cresset in the other, and, leaving his apartment by a private stair which the arras concealed, rapidly traversed the corridors and staircases that led to the Queen's apartment.

His face was haggard—his hands trembled—his eyes were full of fire.

As he ascended softly, taking three steps at a time, he met Ormiston, who, being well aware of the train of thought he had fired, was loitering near to watch the explosion. He paused, and the blood rushed to his brow at meeting even him at such a moment.

"Ha—whither goest thou?" he asked.

"To the tower of Black Agnes," replied Bothwell in a husky voice, while he staggered from his emotions and the effects of the wine.

"Thou darest then at last to act like a man!"

"Like a fiend, if my fate wills it! What may I not dare now, after all I have dared and done? But hark!" said the Earl, as a ghastly pallor overspread his face; "didst thou hear?"

"What?"

"That mournful cry!"

"By the mass! I heard only the skirl of the wild sea-maw."

"Hah!" said the Earl through his clenched teeth, "comest thou from thy grave in yonder abbey church, to scare me from my purpose? Avaunt! thou shalt see that I fear thee not, and thus will trample alike on the vengeance of Heaven, the fears of hell, the stings of conscience, and the slavish laws of men!" and, brandishing his cresset, he sprang up the staircase and disappeared.

Black Ormiston, that colossal ruffian, drew his long sword, and retired into a shadowy part of the corridor to keep watch and ward. The storm still rang without, though its fury was lessened, and coldly the fitful moonlight gleamed upon the frothy waste of waters that boiled around the caverned rocks. It shone at times through the strong iron gratings of the staircase window, and glinted on the dark face, the keen eyes, and bushy moustaches of the watcher, who ever and anon put forth his head to listen.

Still the wind howled—the rain pattered and hissed at intervals, and the mews shrieked like evil spirits as they were swept away on the skirts of the hurrying blast; but, lo! there came a cry from the upper chambers of that strong Saxon tower that gave the listening bravo a shock as of electricity.

A fainter succeeded, and a cold and sinister smile spread over the face of Ormiston.

CHAPTER LXIII.

HANS' PATIENCE IS REWARDED.

THE English pirate still lay in the offing at the mouth of the estuary, and honest Hans Knuber, who, like all the skippers of that time, was his own merchant and supercargo, dared not put to sea; and each fine sunny day, while the fair wind blew down

the river from St. Margaret's Hope, he trod his little deck to and fro, with his hands stuffed into the pockets of his chocolate-coloured small-clothes, his Elsinore cap pulled well over his red eyebrows, and consoling himself by praying to St. Mungo (who once had voyaged in these waters), and by swearing many a round oath in guttural Norse at the obnoxious Englishman, whose broad lateen sails, dark brown at sunrise, and snow-white at sunset, were always visible, as he cruised under the lee of the May, that beautiful isle of old St. Adrian.

Meanwhile the sunny month of May approached, and when Hans thought of the good prices his cargo of wheat and malt would bring in the market of Kiøbenhafn, his vexation increased hourly; and every morning he solemnly gave over the Englishman to the devil and the jormagundr, or great sea-snake, that lies coiled round the foot of the north pole, and makes the whirlpool of Lofoden by wagging its tail.

During this, by the strength of his constitution, and the care of Martin Picauet, Konrad recovered strength daily. He shook off the torpor that weighed upon his spirit; and, while he endeavoured to efface the image of Anna from his memory, it was evident to Hans Knuber, (and *he* was no subtle love casuist), that the prospect of returning to Norway and meeting her again, contributed more than all the skill of the qucen's apothegar to make him a new man.

And though, at times, when bluff Hans would thump him between the shoulders, and drink to Anna's health and his success, in their native dricka or brown Scottish beer, he was wont earnestly to assert, that were she queen of all Scandinavia, from the Naze of Norway to the Isles of Lofoden, he could not, and would not, wed her, after all that had passed; and he felt so: for now, deadened a little by absence, by bitter recollection, and the excess of his first despair, there was at times something of indignation mingled with his memory of her. At others, all his old tenderness would painfully revive, and come gushing back like a flood upon his heart; and she was then remembered only as the Anna of his boyhood's days—the Anna of that early love, which had first been told in whispers and confusion among the Druid groves of Aggerhuis.

From time to time he heard tidings of Bothwell's daring deeds, but all, of course, distorted or discoloured by the malevolence of the narrators; for, in that early age, when news-

papers were unknown, the only means of intelligence were the "common bruit," as rumour was named; and the simple Norseman, who knew nothing of statecraft, of lawless ambition, the lust of power, and the boldness of such a spirit as Bothwell, heard with astonishment how he had slain the king of the land, by blowing his palace, with all his court and attendants, to the number of thousands, his guards, grooms, and horses, into the air; how he had seized the queen and crown; and how he had strangled the young prince before her eyes, because she had refused to marry him; and of how he had imprisoned her in chains in a dark dungeon, where her food was bread and black beer; and, assuming the sceptre, had seated himself on the throne. Poor Hans trembled for his cargo of malt when he heard of these terrible passages, prayed to St. Tradewell of Orkney, and wished himself safe at home.

He and Konrad knew not how common was the stratagem of seizing the Scottish sovereign in those days, and that the seizure of Mary had twice before been attempted—once by the old Earl of Huntly, and once by her brother Moray, on his rebellion in 1565; and, consequently, had Mary viewed Bothwell with any favour, there had been no necessity for his wooing her at the head of a thousand horse.

Meanwhile, Hans waited anxiously the arrival of those French galleys, which at times, under the pennon of the Chevalier de Villaignon, made their appearance in the Scottish firth—for Scotland had then but six or eight ships for military purposes, under the pennons of David Wood, Sir Edmund Blackadder, Thomas Dickson, and Edward Robertson, who (though Buchanan styles them "pirates of known rapacity") were Scottish sea-officers, and vassals of the Lord High Admiral. These ships were then in the Western seas; thus, the pirate of Hull, which was the bane of Hans' existence, lay there unmolested, like a wolf waiting for his prey, and the fishers from the New haven daily brought terrible accounts of her crew; how they were plundering the coast about Crail—how they cruised with a man hanging at each yard-arm—how her poop lanterns were human skulls—and the skipper was said to be the devil himself; for he came ashore every night, not in his jolly-boat, like any other respectable shipman, but in his broad beaver inverted on the water, to attend the witches of Pittenweem, who held the meeting in the weem, or great cavern, below St. Mary's priory;

and thus poor Hans was denied the hope of escaping even in the night, by creeping along the shore, under the brows of Kin-craigie and Elie-ness on the north, or by the broad and beautiful bay of Preston on the south; and so the time wore on—the month of May was passing—and still the *Skottefruin* of Bergen lay off the New haven, with her canvass bent, her brown sides and curved deck blistering in the summer sun.

At last there came tidings that the high admiral was about to put to sea, and that five Scottish frigates were anchored near his castle of Dunbar. Upon this, the pirate disappeared, and Hans Knuber rubbed his eyes again and again, one morning, to assure himself that the offing was clear. Then, impatient to bend his course homeward, he took immediate advantage of the gentle summer breeze that blew from the western hills, and spread his canvass on a beautiful morning in May—though a Friday, of all days in the week, by ancient superstition, the most unpropitious for putting to sea.

Then, with a heart that grew lighter as the Scottish mountains lessened in the distance, Konrad hailed the blue sky and the dark ocean; for he knew that, when land again was visible, it would be the pine-covered hills and thunder-riven cliffs of his native Norway.

CHAPTER LXIII*.

THE LEGEND OF ST. MUNGO.

“MASS!” said Hans Knuber to Konrad, as they walked to and fro one day on the lee side of his quarter-deck; “we have voyaged prosperously. I knew I should not implore the aid of good St. Mungo for nought; though, poor man! his work was like our anchorage in yonder firth—like to have *no end*.”

“Thou seemest ever in a rare mood now, Hans;” replied Konrad; “but what made St. Mungo thy particular patron, and how came it that the work of so holy a man was never done?”

“Why, Master Konrad, ’tis a long story, which I heard from a certain old friar when my crayer was once discharging her cargo at the ancient Stockwell bridge of Glasgow. I care not if I tell it thee to wile away an hour or so; so here cometh like a rope out of the coil, with a wanion on it!—the story I mean, not the saint—the Lord forbid! It happened somewhere about

the time that Erick Blodiaxe was among us here in Norway—the year 530—a long time ago, Master Konrad.”

We here present the legend, not in the words of honest Hans, but as we find it in the MSS. of Magister Absalom, who has entitled it,

The Legend of St. Mungo.

In the days when Eugene III. was king of Scotland, and Lothus ruled the race of the Picts, there was a certain holy woman who dwelt in a cavern on the shore of the river Forth, above where the ruins of the Roman invaders overlooked the mouth of the Carron.

The place was then all desolate, and the land was covered with wood from the dark summit of the distant rock of Stirling, where there frowned the fragments of a Roman tower, to the yellow shore of the river, where the rippling waves rolled up in all their echoing loneliness.

The only traces of men near her dwelling were a circle of stones—large and upright; in the centre lay one whereon the Druids of other times, on the first day of every ninth year, had sacrificed to Odin a foeman taken in battle; and to that mysterious circle, there yet came more than one white-bearded believer in his wild pagan faith to adore the morning sun, as he arose from his bed in the shining eastern sea. Where a busy town now stands, a few squalid huts, built of turf, and mud, and boughs freshly torn from the pine woods, straggled up the rough ascent; and among them grazed a herd of wild cattle, watched by wilder-looking men, half naked and half clad in skins and coats of jointed mail, armed with bows and clubs, long reedy spears, and shields of black bull's hide; while their hair, long, yellow, and uncombed, flowed like horse-manes from beneath their caps of steel.

These were Scottish warriors, who had come on a hunting expedition from their native wilds in the west of Braidalbyn, to drive the deer in the woods of the Pictish race; for Lothus the Just was then at peace with Eugene.

The Scottish prince had wearied of hunting; he had tarried many days among the vast forests that bordered on Bodoria, and more than a hundred noble stags, and a score of the snow-white bulls of Caledonia, had fallen beneath the spears of his huntsmen.

It chanced that on Beltane morning, a beautiful white deer, scared from the mountains by the beal-fires that were lit on their summits, passed the young king, as slowly, dreamily, and alone, he rode along the sandy shore of that broad river, whose glassy surface had been unploughed by a keel since the galleys of Rome had, a hundred years before, quitted, and for ever, their now desolate harbours at Alauna and Alterva. It bounded close by him, lightly and gracefully as a spirit, and disappeared into a gloomy wœm or cavern, up to the mouth of which the white-edged waves were rolling.

He sprang from his horse, threw its bridle, which was massive with brazen ornaments, over the branch of a tree, and, grasping his short hunting-spear, advanced fearlessly into the cavern; but he had not gone ten paces before his steps were arrested, and, removing his steel cap, which was encircled by the rude representation of an ancient diadem, he knelt before St. Thena, the recluse of that desert, and as yet nameless, solitude.

No man knew from whence St. Thena came; she was the daughter of a distant race, and her beauty, which was very great, had doubtless made her seek the wilderness, that there, separated from the temptations of the world, she might dedicate her days to God. For years her food had been barley-bread and a few wild beans, to which, in times of great scarcity, she added a little milk, and now and then a small fish, when the receding waves left it on the shore near her cavern. Her prayer was continual, and her tears often flowed for the benighted and still Pagan state of many of her countrymen. She was good and gentle, and her face, which was seldom seen (for, like her form, it was enveloped in her long sackcloth garment), was said to be one of wondrous beauty. Many feared, but more loved her; and the wild huntsmen, and wilder warriors, when they tracked either the foe or the red deer, through the vast woods or along the desert shores of that far-winding river, avoided to disturb the recluse, and blessed her peaceful life, after their own rude fashion.

The fame of her virtue spread abroad; and through all the land of King Lothus, from the waters of the Tay to those of the Abios, among the northern Saxons, she became known for the austerity of her fasts and other mortifications. Some averred she was the daughter of a king, and that, like the blessed St. Ebba, she had fled to avoid an evil marriage; others,

that she was an angel; for the man who obtained even a glimpse of her figure, with its floating garments, never bent the bow nor threw the net in vain that day.

She stood with one arm around the neck of the deer, to protect it from the intruder; that arm was bare to the elbow, and its whiteness was not surpassed by the snowy coat of the fugitive. Her face was concealed by the overshadowing hood; a rosy little mouth and one long ringlet of golden hair were visible. The young king saw with pain, that her tender feet had no protection from the flinty floor of the cavern—that flinty floor whereon she knelt daily, before a rough wooden cross, which St. Serf of Lochleven had fashioned for her with his own holy hands.

Timidly she gazed on the young Scottish king, whose strong and graceful form was clad in a close-fitting hauberk of steel scales, and a tunic of bright-coloured breacan, that reached to his knees, which were bare; his sandals were covered with plates of polished brass, and were plaited salterwise to within six inches of his tunic. A crimson mantle hung from his left shoulder, and on his right were his bow, fashioned of yew from the forest of Glenure, and his arrows, feathered from the wings of the swift eagles of Lochtreig.

“Warrior!” said the Recluse, “spare me this deer; it is the only living thing that clings to me, or to which my heart yearns in this wilderness.”

“It is spared,” replied the huntsman, lowering the bright point of his spear; “but whence is it, gentle voice, that so much beauty and goodness are hidden from the world; and that one so fair, so young, and so queen-like, is vowed to this life of austerity and seclusion?”

“Because my heart told me it was my vocation; and now, warrior, I pray you to leave me, for I may not, and must not hold converse with men.”

“Saint Thena, thou seest that I know thee,” replied the young man gently; “I am Eugene, the King of the fierce Scottish tribes that dwell beyond the Grampians. Even there, among these distant mountains, we have heard of thy holiness and piety; and I will bless the hour that led me to thy cavern, for I have looked on a form that will never be forgotten.”

“And, king, what seekest thou here among these woods?”

“The white bull with its eyes of fire, and the great stags and

wild elks of this rich land of the Cruitnieh; but say, gentle Thena, may I not come again to have thy blessing ere I return to the wilds and wars of my own dark mountains in the land of the west?"

The saint paused, and the young king saw that her bosom heaved. Another long golden tress fell from her dark hood, and he could perceive, when her lips unclosed, that her teeth were white as the pearls of his diadem; again he urged, for an unholy curiosity burned within him, and the poor Recluse replied—

"Why should I shun thee? come, yes, and I shall bless thee; go and I shall bless thee likewise. God's will be done! I am armed against temptation; but, O king! I am not above the tongue of reproach."

"Art thou not Thena, the saint, and the holy one?" replied the young king; and, fearful lest she should retract her promise, he withdrew, and, still more slowly and thoughtfully than before, pursued his way by the echoing strand to the camp, where his bare-kneed Dalriads were stretched on the grassy sward, with their bucklers cast aside and bows unstrung, wiling away the sunny hours with bowls of blaedium, while the harpers sang of the wars of Fingal of Selma, and Fergus the son of Ere.

But a spell had fallen upon the Recluse, and after the king was gone, his voice seemed to linger in her ear, and his stately form was still before her; with his shining hauberk, and his bright curling locks, that glittered in the sunlight.

The next day's eve was declining.

The sun was setting, like a circle of flame, behind the western hills; the waters of Bodoria rolled in light, and the bright green leaves of its pathless shores were glittering with the early dew, when the king, with a bugle in his baldrick, and a spear in his hand, again approached the cavern of Thena. He was alone and unattended, save by his favourite dog; one of those dark-eyed and deep-chested hounds of Albyn, rough, shaggy, and gigantic, like the Bran of other days.

He entered softly. The saint was at prayer, and she knelt on the bare step of her altar, which was a fragment of the living rock; a skull, thrown by the waves upon the shore, was placed thereon; and above it stood the cross of St. Serf. The white deer, which was asleep on the Recluse's bed of dry leaves, sprang up on the stranger's entrance, and cowered beside her.

Eugene paused till her orisons were over, and gazed the while with wonder. Her hood had fallen back, and her long flowing hair, which steel had never touched, fell in luxuriance to her knees. Reflected from the glassy waters of the river, a ray of the setting sun entered the cavern; her tresses shone in light, and she seemed something ethereal, for they glittered like a halo of glory around her. The young king was intoxicated; and a deep sigh escaped him.

It startled the Recluse, and, as she turned, a glow of shame, perhaps of anger, overspread her beautiful countenance.

The king implored her forgiveness.

And the gentle St. Thena forgave him; and in token, gave him a ring which she had that morning found upon the shore; and the king vowed to offer up a prayer for the donor, whenever he looked upon it.

Again and again the young king came to visit the fair inmate of that lonely cavern. After a time she ceased to chide his visits; and though she wept and prayed after his departure, and vowed to fly from him into the wild woods that covered the howe of the Lowland Ross, she still lingered; and thus, day by day, the spell closed around her, and, day by day, the king came to lay the unwished for, and unrequested, spoils of the chase at her feet, until St. Thena learned to welcome him with smiles, to wreath her ringlets with her white fingers, to long for evening, and to watch the fading sunlight as it died on the distant sea—yea, to watch it with impatience, but *not*, as in other days, for the hour of evening prayer.

It was surely a snare of the evil one to throw a handsome and heedless young prince in the path of this poor recluse, who had neither the power of St. Dunstan, when the fell spirit came to him in his cell at Glastonbury, nor the virtue of St. Anthony, when he tempted him so sorely in the old sepulchre wherein he dwelt at Como. Nothing short of a blessed miracle could have saved her, and no miracle was wrought.

Her good angel covered his face with his wings, and St. Thena fell, as her mother Eve had fallen before her.

On his caparisoned horse, with all the bells of its bridle jangling, the wicked young king rode merrily along the sandy shore of the shining river; and the red eyes of his great hound sparkled when he hallooed to the dun deer, that on the distant ridges were seen against the western sky, for it was evening now.

Thus merrily King Eugene sought the camp where his warrior huntsmen, impatient at his tarrying so long in the land of the wheat-eaters, muttered under their thickbeards that waved in the rising wind, and pointed to the blue peak of the distant Benlomond, that looked down on the lake, with all its wooded isles—the lake where the fish swam without fins, the waves rolled without wind, and the fairies dwelt on a floating islet.

St. Thena was very sad.

A deep grief and a sore remorse fell upon her; she confessed her errors to good St. Serf, who dwelt on an isle of the lonely Leven, and the saint blessed and absolved her, because she had sinned and repented. Daily she prayed—yea, hourly—for the forgiveness of God; that the youth might return no more; and, though he had seduced her from her vows to heaven, that his presence might not be permitted to disturb her sincere repentance.

But he came not; war had broken out on the western hills of Caledonia, and, leaguely with Dovenald of Athole, Arthur, the son of Uther Pendragon, was coming with his white-mantled Britons against the bare-knee'd Dalreudini; and hastening to his home, where the seven towers of Josina look down on the mountains of Appin, King Eugene returned to St. Thena no more. Her remorse was bitter; but time, which cureth all things, brought no relief to her, for she found that she had become a mother; and there, unseen in that lonely cavern, gave birth to a boy—the son of a Scottish king; and when she laid him on her bed of soft leaves and dried grass, she thought of the little child Jesus, as he lay in the manger at Bethlehem, and thought herself happy, vowing the child to the service of God as an atonement for her own sin.

And lo! it seemed to her as if, for a time, that the same star which shone above Bethlehem sparkled on the pure forehead of the sinless babe, and from that moment the heart of St. Thena rejoiced. All the mother gushed upon her troubled soul, and she would have worshipped the infant, for it was a miracle of beauty—and its feet and hands, they were so tiny and so rosy, she was never tired of kissing them, and bedewing them with her tears.

That night she felt happy, as, nestling beside her tame deer, the poor recluse hushed her babe to sleep, and covered its little form with her only garment, that it might not hear the wind

mourning in those vast forests that overshadowed the shore, where the waves of the eternal sea were breaking in their loneliness.

I have said that Lothus was king of the land: he dwelt on the opposite shore, which he called Lothian, from himself. Now it chanced that a daughter of this king, attended by a train of maormars and ladies on horseback, came to visit St. Thena, the fame of whose holiness had spread from the rising to the setting sun. This princess, who was soon to be espoused by Eugene king of the Scots, was a proud and a wicked woman. St. Serf had recently converted her from Paganrie to the blessed faith; but her secret love yet lingered after the false gods of her fathers, and she still (as in her childhood) worshipped the crystal waters of a fountain that flowed at her father's palace gate; for her mother was of the tribe of the Lavernani, who dwelt on the banks of the Gryfe.

Dismounting with softness and fear near the cavern, the princess paused a moment to have her attire adjusted, that she might overawe the poor recluse by the splendour of its aspect. According to the fashion of the Pictish virgins, her flaxen hair flowed over her shoulders; her tunic was of scarlet cloth, and reached to her sandals; her mantle was of the yellow linen then woven by the distant Gauls, and it was fastened on her right shoulder by a shining beryl—an amulet of great virtue, which had been given to her mother by the last arch-druid of the Lavernani, and, filled with the vain thought of these things, she sought the presence of St. Thena. She was sleeping.

Softly the princess drew near, and, lo! she saw the babe that slept in the bosom of the recluse, and uttered a cry of spite and anger. St. Thena awoke, and, while her face reddened with modest shame, she raised one hand to shield the child, and the other in supplication.

"Hypocrite that thou art!" exclaimed the half Pagan princess, "is it for *this* that thou dwellest in caverns and lonely places, like the good druids of our forefathers! Truly it was wise of thee; for thy deeds require the cloak of darkness and obscurity. Ha!" she continued scornfully, seeing that the saint wept, "dost thou weep in contrition for thine abominable hypocrisy, or in terror of the punishment it so justly merits, and which I may mete out to thee? And is it to visit such as thee that I have endured so much in journeying through wild

places, by pathless woods and rocky rivers? Ha! if such as thou art a priestess of the Christians' triple God, I say, welcome again be those of Him who rideth on the north wind, and whose dwelling-place is in yonder glorious sun, which we now see rising from his bed in the waters."

This imperious lady, as a mark of disgrace, then ordered the beautiful hair of St. Thena to be entirely cut off, and committed to the winds, that the birds might line their nests with it; and she further commanded her Pagan followers to place the poor recluse and her infant in a crazy little currach, or boat of wicker-work and deerskin, and commit them to the waters of the great river, that they might be borne to the distant sea.

The boat was old and decayed; it had been used in war, and flint arrows and spears had pierced its sides of skin. A human head and shoulders, dried in the wind, and tanned with the bark of the oak-tree, ornamented its prow. Long ringlets of fair Saxon hair waved about its shrunken ears, and two clam-shells filled its hollow eyelids; it was a horrible and ghastly companion, and, when night came on, seemed like a demon of the sea, leading the fallen saint to destruction.

Endlong and sidelong, the sport of the waves and the current, the boat drifted down the broad Bodoria; the sun set behind the hills of the west, and its last rays faded away from the mountain peaks that look down on the valley of Dolour, and the waters of Sorrow and Care. The sky grew dark, and the shores grew darker; there were no stars, but the red sheet lighting gleamed afar off, revealing the rocky isles of the widening estuary. Still the boat floated on, darkly and silently; and, resigned to her fate, and pouring all her soul in prayer—but prayer only for the poor infant that nestled in her bosom—St. Thena, overcome with weariness, after a time sank to sleep; and then, more than ever, did her good angel watch over her.

When she awoke, the sun had risen again; there was no motion; the little bark was still. Thena looked around her. The currach was fast, high and dry, upon a sandy beach; on one side, the broad and glassy river was flowing past; on the other, were the green and waving woods of Rosse.* An old man, with long flowing garments and a beard of snow that

* Fife, so called as it lay between the Tay and Forth; hence *Kinross* and *Culross*, the head and back of Rosse.

floated in the passing wind, approached ; and in his bent form, and the cross-staff on which he lent, she recognised St. Serf of the Isle, and hurried to meet him and implore his blessing on her babe. Then the good man blessed it, and taking a little water from a limpid fountain that poured over a neighbouring rock, he marked its little forehead with the cross, and called the babe *Mungo*—a name which, he prophesied, would become famous in future times.

And there, in that lonely place, where the fountain ran, the mother built a cell, where she dwelt in holiness, rearing her boy for the service of God ; there she died in the odour of sanctity, and there she was interred ; and above her grave her son built an oratory, which is called, even unto this day, by the burghers of Culross, the Chapel of St. Mungo.

His mother's feast is the 18th of July, in the Scottish calendar.

Reared by St. Serf, and trained up in the way he was to pursue, the little boy, who imitated that man of God in all things, became, as he waxed older, a pattern of Christian humility and piety ; and those hours which were not spent in labouring with his hands, that he might have food and raiment to bestow on the sick, the aged, and the poor, (for he called the poor the children of God,) he spent in prayer for the sins of men ; and long after the blessed Serf had passed away to the company of saints, who are in heaven, the young man had waxed tall and strong, stately in figure and beautiful in face ; but the fame of his goodness and sanctity exceeded even those of his pastor, until the simple people of the land, who knew not he was the son of their king, began to assert that his birth had been miraculous.

Now, after many days of deep meditation in the dark woods of Rosse, and of prayer at the shrine of his sainted mother, for her intercession and support, the young man took the staff of St. Serf, and set forth on a pilgrimage to convert the benighted heathens of the south and west ; for there were many still in Mercia and the land of the Deirii, who in their secret hearts worshipped fountains that sprung in lonely places, or made human sacrifices in the depths of forests, and lit Beltane fires on the lofty hills in honour of the rising sun ; and so, moved by these things, St. Mungo gave the little he possessed to the poor, and, undeterred by the terrors of the journey, by the hostile

tribes of savage men, and the equally savage denizens of the vast forests that covered the plains and mountains of Caledonia, the prowling wolves, the howling bulls, the grisly bears and ravenous boars, he went forth to teach and baptize, to convert and to save.

His under garment was sackcloth ; his upper was the white skin of a sheep ; his head had no other covering than his own fair hair, which curled upon his shoulders and mingled with his beard.

In that age there was no money in the land, save the old coins of the Roman invaders, which the women wore as amulets, and so the saint took no care for his sustenance. He had ever eternity before him ; in the morning reflecting that he might not see the night, in the night reflecting that he might not see the morning. The acorns and the wild herbs of the forest were his food ; a little water in the hollow of his hand quenched his thirst ; and he regretted the time spent in these necessities, as so much taken from the service of his Master. He travelled throughout the whole isle of Britain, preaching, and taking no rest ; hence cometh the old proverb—Like the work of St. Mungo, which never was done.

Now the fame of his preaching went far and wide, throughout the length and breadth of the land, till King Eugene in his distant castle of Dunolli, on the mountains of Midlorn, heard of the fame of St. Mungo, and dedicated to him an island in western Lochleven, which still bears his name, and it became the burial-place of the men of Glencoe, who name it *Eilan Munda*, or the Island of St. Mungo. But Eugene knew not that the saint was his son, and as little did his Queen (with whom he lived in continual strife,) suppose that he was the same little boy, whom, with his mother, in that wicked moment of wrath and pride, she had committed to the waters of Bodoria ; and tidings came that he was preaching and teaching the four gospels in the kingdom of Strathclyde, where he was daily bringing into the fold of God those red-haired Attacotti, who were said to be worshippers of fire and eaters of human flesh. He brought them to repentance and a horror of their ways ; they levelled the stones of Loda, the altars of their wickedness, and destroyed the temples of their dreadful idols. He baptized them in thousands at a little stream that meandered through a plain to pour its waters in the Clyde.

To the saint it seemed that this was like the place where his

mother lay ; and there he built a bower among the alder-bushes, and rested for a time from his pious labours.

Now, about this time, it chanced that the ring which St. Thena had found upon the shore was the occasion of much discord between Eugene and his Pictish Queen ; for, having bestowed it upon her as a gift at Yule-tide, she had lost it, and thereby excited his jealousy. He swore by the *black stones of Iona*, the great oath of the Gaël, that she should die a terrible death if the ring appeared not before the Beltane day ; and, within three days of that time, the Queen in great tribulation appeared at the bower on the Clyde, to seek the advice and consolation of St. Mungo ; for she had not evilly bestowed the jewel, but had lost it, and knew not where or how ; though she dreamt that a bird had flown away with it, and dropped it in the sea.

Though he had learned, from his mother's prayers, of the wrong this proud Queen had done her, St. Mungo chid her not, but heard her story benignantly ; and she told him in touching language of the king's wrath, and the value of the ring, for it had in it a pearl of great value : only two such were found in the Dee—one was in that trinket, and the other is at this hour in the Scottish diadem, where King Eugene placed it.

St. Mungo ordered one who stood near him to throw a baited line into the Clyde, and, lo ! there was drawn forth a noble salmon, having in its mouth a beautiful ring. The Queen knew it to be her own, and in a transport of joy she vowed to found there a cathedral church, in honour of God and St. Mungo, who should be first bishop of that see ; and there, where the alder-bower had stood, the great lamp of the western tribes was founded and built, and the city that rose around was named Glasgow ; but the spot was then, as the old Cistercian monk of Furness tells us, made pleasant by the shade of many a stately tree.

There, after preaching the gospel with St. David, and turning many away from Pelagianism, after converting all the northern Picts, and building an abbey at Culross, where his mother lay, St. Mungo, the first bishop of Glasgow, passed away to the company of the saints, on the 13th day of January, 603, having reached the miraculous age of a hundred and eighty-five years ; and there, in this cathedral church, we may yet see his shrine, where many a miracle was wrought of old, when faith was strong in the land, and where the pious of other days gifted many a

stone of wax for the candles at a daily mass for the repose of his soul.

In honour of St. Mungo we may to this hour see, in the arms of the great city he founded, the tree under which he built his bower, with his mass-bell hanging on a branch thereof; across its stem is the salmon with the ring of the Scottish Queen in its mouth, and the bird that first bore it away has also a place on that armorial tree. Before the Reformation, St. Mungo's head, mitred, appeared in the dexter side of the shield; and on an eseroll are the last words of that good man, which were a blessing upon the city and a prayer to God that in all future time Glasgow should *flourish*.

Such was the tale related by the old monk of Glasgow to Hans, who had no sooner concluded, than he drew a hand from his breeches pocket, and directed Konrad's attention to a low streak of blue that, on their lee-quarter, marked the distant Oyster-head of Denmark, and a shout of joy rang through the ship.

CHAPTER LXIV.

MARY'S DESPAIR.

WE return to Dunbar.

The sun was rising from the sea, and redly its morning splendour shone upon the rock-built towers of old Dunbar, as they frowned upon the bright green ocean and its snow-white foam. The estuary of the Forth shone like gold in the glory of the east; fed by the streams from a thousand hills, it there expanded to an ocean, and its broad bosom, dotted by fisher boats and by Flemish caravells, swept round its rocky isles in surf, and washed with tiny waves of silver the shells and pebbles that bordered its sandy margins—margins shaded by the summer woods of Fife and Lothian, and overlooked by many a green and many a purple peak.

One great window that lit the Queen's apartment in the Agnes Tower, overlooked this beautiful prospect. It was open, and the morning breeze from the eastern sea blew freely upon Mary's pallid cheek, and lifted her dishevelled hair; she seemed very desolate and broken-hearted. She was reclining in a large

velvet chair, in the shadow of one of the thick brocaded window curtains, which made the corner she occupied so dark, that to a pair of eyes which were observing her through a hole in the arras behind the high and canopied bed, little else was visible than her snow-white hands clasped before her, a jewel that sparkled in her unbound hair, a spangle or two that glittered on the stomacher of her disordered dress, or among the folds of her torn veil—that white and flowing veil, which had won for her the romantic sobriquet of *la Reine Blanche*.

Her face was blistered by weeping; her lips were pale; she drooped her graceful head, and closed her blood-shot eyes, as if oppressed by an ocean of heavy thoughts. All that pride, energy, and indomitable courage which had sustained her unshaken amid a thousand scenes of outrage, insult, and sorrow, had now deserted her, laying her noble spirit prostrate; nothing but her gentle nature and woman softness remained behind. She was then, as she touchingly tells in one of her letters, desolate of all council, and separated from all female attendance."

The very stupor of despair seemed to have settled upon her soul; she sat still—motionless as a statue, and nothing but the heaving of her bosom would have indicated that she lived. Yesterday she seemed so full of vivacity, so pure, so beautiful.

In this poor crushed being—this butterfly, formed only for the light and the sunshine of life—in this lonely and desolate woman, with her weeping eyes, her dishevelled hair, and torn dress, who could have recognised the same beautiful queen that shone so lately at Sebastian's hall, in all the pride of royalty? and a loveliness heightened to the utmost by magnificence of dress; and who, only five days before, had sat on the throne in the hall of the Scottish estates, with the crown of the Bruce on her brow, the St. Andrew sparkling on her bosom, and the sceptre of the Jameses in her hand, assenting to those laws by which we are still governed?

"Alas, for the Queen of Scotland and of France!" exclaims the old Magister Absalom. "Oh, for twenty knights of that good chivalry her grandsire led to Flodden, or of that glittering gendarmerie that many a time and oft had lowered their white pennons before her at the Tilts of the Tournelles, and on the Plains of Montmartre!"

A sound made her raise her head; the arras rose and fell, and Bothwell stood before her.

Shame crimsoned his brow, and confusion dimmed his eye; he felt compassion and remorse, together with the bitter conviction that he had gone too far to recede. The dreadful gulf between himself and other men was now wider than before; but he felt that to stand still was to sink into it and perish. He had yet to progress. He knew not how to address his victim. Her aspect filled him with pity, sorrow, and a horror of himself. He knew that he had irreparably ruined her honour, and destroy her peace; and this was the woman he loved!

Strange it was, that now he felt himself alike attracted and repelled by her; but the necessity of soothing her compelled him to speak, and as policy ever supplied him with words, hurriedly, gently, and eloquently (for he too felt deeply, now when the storm of passion had died away), he endeavoured to console her; to declare his contrition; his willingness to die as an atonement; and then, stung with remorse on witnessing the agony of her grief, he attempted to destroy himself with his own sword, and turned her despair into momentary terror, by inflicting on his own person a wound, from which the blood flowed freely.* Then he ventured to fold her in his arms, and to kiss her pale brow respectfully, assuring her again and again that she was now a thousand times dearer to him than ever. Then, sinking on his knees, he bowed down his head, and abjectly implored her pardon; but Mary remained silent, passive, speechless, cold as marble; and her situation seemed so hopeless, so woe-begone, and irrelievable, that the Earl in despair knew not what more to urge. He received no answer, and his heart trembled between love, remorse for the past, and apprehension of the future.

"Speak, dearest madam," said he; "for the mercy of Heaven, speak to me! Dost thou wish to leave Dunbar?"

"Yes!" replied Mary, rising with sudden energy, as if all her spirit had suddenly welled up in her breast. "Yes!" she continued, gathering up her dishevelled hair with her slender and trembling fingers. "My train!—my people!—summon them! —I will go—"

"Thou wilt go?" said the Earl, whose dark eyes shone with a sad and wild expression, "and where?"

"To Edinburgh."

"To denounce me to its purse-proud citizens—to proclaim

me at the barrier-gates and market-cross of every Scottish burgh—at the Court of every European king, to be what I am—what I shrink from contemplating. That I am a craven knight, a perjured peer, a rebel, and a ruffian! Ha, ha! No! hence shalt thou never go but with Bothwell at thy bridal-rein, with his banner before, his knights around, and his spearmen behind thee. What has hurried me on, step by step, in the terrible career on which my destiny has driven me—from being the leader of the Scottish peers, esteemed in council as in battle, respected by mine equals, loved by my vassals, and feared by mine enemies—what hath made me, from being all this, a man whose name will perhaps be remembered in the land with reprobation, with curses, and with bitterness—what, but thy beauty, thy fatal beauty? Oh, wretched woman! a curse upon it, I say, for it hath been the cause of all! Fatal sorceress, thou still smilest upon me with scorn! In undoing thee, I have perhaps but undone myself; though from this time our fates and lives are entwined together; for, bethink thee, for very dread of what may ensue, for very shame, and for the reparation of thine own honour, thou canst not destroy me. Yet can I read in thine eye, that thou hast visions of the dungeon, the block, the axe, the dismembered limbs, and the severed head of Bothwell, spiked on yonder city cross to welter in the midnight dew, and broil in the noonday sun—hah!”

And, rendered half-furious by the picture his fancy conjured up, he gave her a push, so violent that she sank down on her knees, trembling and in tears.

Suddenly she arose again to her full height, her dark eyes flashing, and her proud nostrils appearing almost to dilate with the anger that curled her beautiful lip; she gave him one full, bright glance of reproach and anger, as she attempted to sweep from his presence; but the Earl firmly held her back, and, aware of the futility of attempting to pacify her at present, retired abruptly, leaving her still unattended, to sorrow and to tears.

Sir James Melville, who, as we have elsewhere stated, had been expelled that morning from Dunbar, relates that Bothwell's fury compelled her every day to weep—that she would have left him, but dared not—and that she would have *destroyed herself*, could she have found a knife or dagger; but a strict watch was kept over all her actions.

And thus passed twelve long and weary days, during which no attempt was made by her nobles, her knights, or her people, to relieve her. Each man gossiped to his neighbour of the unco' doings at Dunbar—citizens stared stupidly at each other, and contented themselves by marvelling sorely where all these startling events were likely to end.

So much of this part of our story belongs to the chronicles of the time, that it must be glanced at briefly, that we may hasten to the portion involving the fate of Konrad, and more particularly of the great Earl himself.

How he conducted Mary to Edinburgh, guarded by 1200 spearmen on horseback, and compelled her to appear in presence of the new chancellor and the nobles, and there to declare herself at full liberty—how he had the dukedom of Orkney, a marquise, and other titles conferred upon himself—and how he caused the bans of marriage between Mary and himself to be proclaimed in the great church of St. Giles, while she remained a captive in the castle of Edinburgh, which was garrisoned by his own vassals, and commanded by Sir James Balfour, the holder of the bond of blood, the brother of the Lord of Nottland, and of Robert Balfour, proprietor of the lonely house of the Kirk-of-Field—are known to every historical reader.

Still Mary withheld her consent to the marriage, for which the impetuous Earl made every preparation with determined deliberation.

A woman—a widow—a Catholic—without a husband—she could never have governed Protestant Scotland, crowded as it was with rapacious peers and turbulent serfs, inured to blood and blows ; and now, after all that had occurred at Dunbar, and after being so completely abandoned by her people to Bothwell's mercy for twelve weary days, no foreign prince, no Scottish noble or gentleman of honour, and indeed no man, save he who had wronged her, would seek her hand.

She had but two misfortunes to choose between ; on one hand to lose her crown, her liberty, perhaps her life ; on the other, to accept of Bothwell, whom (though she never loved, and now abhorred) she knew to be devoted to her, and as crafty as he was gallant and bold ; and might, if he chose, wrest the sceptre from her grasp ; for, by the number of his vassals, and the strength of his fortresses, he was one of Scotland's most powerful peers. Should she wed him, acquitted as he had been

by the peers and prelates of the crime of which he had been charged, and recommended by these same reverend prelates and statecrafty peers, with her brother at their head, to her earnest and favourable notice, a new dawn might shine upon her gloomy fortune. She knew that he had made every preparation for their public nuptials; and that *bongré malgré* she must wed, but still she withheld her consent until the very night before, and then, but not till *then*, the fatal promise was given.

In that wide and gloomy flood of desperation through which she struggled, her destroyer was the last plank to whom she could cling; and, abhorrent as he was to her now, she knew that he loved her deeply, and that sad, and terrible, and guilty, were the ties which bound them together, and would link their names in one to the latest posterity.

CHAPTER LXV.

THE BRIDAL AT BELTANE.

Now came sweet May with its flowers and sunshine. Yellow buttercups sprinkled with gold the sides of Arthur's seat, and the blue hyacinth and the mountain-daisy unfolded their petals on the steep slopes of Salisbury. The mavis and the merle sang merrily in the abbey orchards and old primeval oaks that shaded the grey walls of Holyrood; and sheltered by the thorn hedges that, in its ancient garden, grew like thick and impervious ramparts, the flowers of summer that Mary loved so well, were all, like herself, in the noon of their beauty and fragranee.

And now came Beltane-eve, when this soft season of sunshine and perfume was welcomed by those ancient merry-makings of which we read in Polydore Virgil, and which were a remnant of those joyous rites offered to the Flora of the Romans, and the great fire-god of the Scandinavians and the Celtæ—when the stern and mysterious Druids of Emona and Iona collected the dew of the morning, and sprinkled it on the fair-haired savages of Caledonia, as they blessed them in the name of the god of fire—the Beal of Scandinavia, and the Baal of the Moabites and Chaldeans.

Blooming Beltane came, but not as of old; for there was no maypole on the burgh links, or at the abbey-cross, and no queen

of the May or stout Robin Hude to receive the homage of happy hearts ; for the thunders of the reformed clergy had gone forth like a chill over the land, and the same iron laws that prevented the poor "papist" from praying before the symbol of his redemption, punished the merry for dancing round a garlanded tree.

Yet there were some remnants of other days that could not be repressed ; and fires of straw were lit in the yard of many a castle and homestead, through which, as a charm against witchcraft, all the cattle were driven, amid furious fun and shouts of laughter ; while the bluff laird regaled his vassals, and the bonneted farmer his sun-burned hinds, on pease-bannocks and nut-brown ale. Every old woman still marked her Beltane-bannock with the cross of life and the cipher of death, and covering it with a mixture of meal, milk, and eggs, threw two pieces over her left shoulder at sunrise, saying as she did so—

“ *This* for the mist and storm,
To spare our grass and corn ;
This for the eagle and gled,
To spare the lamb and kid.”

Door-lintels were still decorated with twigs of rowan-tree tied crosswise with red thread ; and though the idolatrous Beltane-fire blazed on the summits of the Calton and Blackford, (as on St. Margaret's day they do still on those of Dalry, in Ayrshire,) there was not the same jollity in the land ; for, as a mist from the ocean blights the ripening corn, so had the morose influence of the new clergy cast a gloom upon the temper, the manners, and the habits of the people—a gloom that is only now fading away, though its shadow still lingers in the rural valleys of the south and west.

But there is much to relate, and we must be brief.

Encompassed by the intrigues of the Earl, surrounded by his creatures, and overwhelmed by the terrible situation in which she found herself, at midnight Mary consented to become his bride, and at *four o'clock* next morning he led her into the great hall of Holyrood, where one of his minions, Adam Bothwell, the Protestant Bishop of Orkney—(his new dukedom)—together with Craig, the colleague of Knox, prepared to officiate.

Mary was attired in her widow-weeds of sable velvet, without other ornament than a few diamonds, that sparkled on her stomacher, and in her ear-rings. Cold, placid, still, and

thoughtful, there were signs of suffering and sorrow on her pure and open brow, and in her deep, dark, melancholy eyes, and there was a nun-like solemnity in her beautiful face, that touched the heart of Bothwell with more, perhaps, of pity than love.

She seemed a changed and miserable woman.

A sprig of rosemary and a lily were in her hand; the first, because of the old superstition that it was necessary at a wedding as denoting love and truth; the second, because the month was that of St. Mary, and the lily is the flower of the Virgin. Mary Stuart could not forget these little things, though she accepted of a Protestant ritual because her own Church is averse to second marriages.

Day was breaking in the distant east, and coldly the dull grey twilight struggled with the lamps and wax candles that illuminated the long and ancient hall of the palace, from the walls of which the grim visage of many an antique king, and many a solemn prelate, seemed to stare starkly and desolately on that sombre bridal group, on Bothwell's magnificent costume, sparkling with precious stones—on tall Ormiston, in his half military and half gala costume, and a crowd of adherents of the House of Hepburn, whose dresses of velvet and satin, enriched with embroidery and precious stones, fluttering mantles, waving feathers, glittering spurs and daggers, filled up the background.

When Mary's hand touched his, the Earl found it cold as death; it trembled. He thought of Darnley's quivering throat on *that* terrible night, and a thrill shot through his heart.

The ceremony was over, and Bothwell led forth that high-born and beautiful bride, to win whom he had dared and done so much.

For that hour he had perilled every thing in this world, and the hour had come, but there was not in his heart that fierce triumph—that exultation and joy, he had so long anticipated. A deadly coldness had succeeded, and there was a clamorous anxiety in his breast as he looked forward to the future.

"Mary, star of heaven and mother of God," prayed the poor queen, kissing the lily, as they descended the gloomy stone staircase of the Albany Tower; "intercede for me, that I may be forgiven this dark sacrilege in the month so solemnly dedicated to thee!" for, according to the ancient usage, it is still ominous to wed in the month of May—or *Mary*. Her piety was deep and fervent; when very young she had wished to assume the

veil, that she might dwell with her aunt, the Prioress of Rheims ; happy would it have been for her had she done so ; and full upon her heart came back the first pious wish in that hour of humiliation and evil.

No pageants or rejoicings marked the ill-omened bridal ; not a bell was rung, nor a cannon fired, and gloomily and in silence the few loiterers who were abroad at that early hour, or had never been a-bed, greeted their sovereign, and that presumptuous peer who had so determinedly espoused her.

That dawn, to Mary, was but the opening of another chapter in her life of misery and tears.

In one month from that day, Bothwell, instead of seating himself upon the Scottish throne, and making Black Hob an Earl, found all his stupendous projects fade away, like mist in the sunshine, and saw himself a homeless fugitive, east, like a weed, upon the ocean of events.

The general, but somewhat curious indignation this marriage excited among those nobles who had *urged it* (having never had any other object in view than the gratification of their own greed and ambition), and their armed confederation against Bothwell, soon followed, for they accused him of intending to destroy the young prince, who was kept at Stirling by the Countess of Mar, and whom ostensibly they rose in arms to defend.

On this measure he was frequently urged by Black Hob.

“Cock and pie !” that worthy would frequently exclaim, “werest this young cub once strangled *too*, thou mightest be king of broad Scotland, and I a belted earl.”

“Tempter, begone !” replied the Earl, grasping his poniard ; “far enough hast thou driven me on this desperate career—but another whisper of this, and thou diest !”

The armed combination soon made the Earl and his knights rush to arms ; and, of all who followed his banner, there were none who hailed the approaching civil war with greater ardour than Ormiston and Bolton. The first, because, by a long career of profligacy, he had utterly ruined an ancient patrimony ; the second, with a stern joy, because he was reckless, tired of life, and longing only for an honourable death, that in the oblivion of the grave he might for ever forget Mariette, and that remorse which rendered him miserable.

But Mary’s surrender to the peers, and Bothwell’s flight, frustrated their hopes for a time.

On the hill of Carberry, within view of the adverse lines, Mary and the Earl were parted to meet no more; and it is recorded that he bade her adieu with more sincerity of sorrow than might have been expected in one so long hardened by private and political profligacy.

"Farewell to thee, Lord Earl!" said the Queen kindly, for she was ever gentle; "nathless all that hath passed, Mary Stuart can still with kindness say farewell, and God attend thee."

"Farewell to your grace!" replied the Earl, as he kissed her hand with tenderness. "Adieu, Mary! thou who hast been the light, the hope, the pole-star of my life, and whom, more than that life, I have held dear. A long good-night to thee, and all the visions my ambition so vainly pictured, and so ruthlessly attempted to grasp. I go; but, while life remains, I will bear in sad remembrance thy goodness, thy beauty, and thy wrongs. I go—to exile and despair!"

And turning his horse's head, attended only by Ormiston and Bolton, he galloped down the hill to his castle of Dunbar, never once daring to look back towards that fair being whom a reverse of fortune had delivered to his enemies; and, save a message she sent to Denmark on her escape from Loehleven, never once from that hour did the name of Bothwell sully the lips of Mary.

In one week from that day he was a pirate among the Isles of Orkney, while Mary was a captive in the hands of the confederates, and led through the streets of her own capital, where

Around her numberless the rabble flow'd,
Shouldering each other, crowding for view,
Gaping and gazing, taunting and reviling,
Some pitying; but those, alas! how few.
The most, such iron hearts we are, and such
The base barbarity of human kind,
With insolence and loud reproach pursued her,
Hooting and railing, and with villanous hands
Gathering the filth from out the common ways
To hurl it on her head.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE WHIRLPOOL.

TOSSED by adverse winds in the German sea, the labouring erayer of Hans Knuber, after several weeks (during which he became more and more convinced that Nippen, the spirit of evil, and the demons of the waves and wind, were in league against him), made a haven in the bleak isles of Shetland, where they found those udallers, who inhabited the rude round towers and strong houses on the bluffs and promontories that overhung the ocean, all on the alert ; for tidings were abroad that the great Earl of Bothwell, now a fugitive and a wanderer upon the face of the deep, in the madness and impotence of his wrath against his enemies, was spreading devastation and dismay among the northern isles.

After suffering a severe repulse at the Oreadian capital from the cannon of his old ally, Sir Gilbert Balfour of Noltland, he poured his fury upon the stray vessels he met in firth and bay, giving the poor hamlets of these half-desolate coasts to the flames, storming the fortlets of their lords, and, like a wild vikingr of old, spreading terror wherever his banner was unfurled.

Hans Knuber trembled again for his cargo of malt and beer when he heard of these terrible doings, and without other delay than that caused by procuring fresh water from a certain gifted well among those dreary hills that overlooked the sound of Balta, he bore away for the Skager Rack ; but, notwithstanding every exertion of seamanship, whistling most perseveringly for fair winds, and sprinkling salt on the sea to lay the foul, the middle of June arrived before he prepared to enter the fiord of Christiana, and ere Konrad saw the shore of his native province rising from the dark blue water, and hailed those peaks, known as the hills of Paradise, that encircle the sea, arise before him with all their echoing woods and snow-white cataracts.

But there even, in their native seas, the fame and terror of the outlawed Earl had gone before them ; and many a dismayed and many a shattered hull, with blood-stained decks and broken hatches, rolling on the Skager Rack or stranded on the rocks of the fiord, attested the recklessness of that desperate noble and his followers, who were now at war with all mankind.

"I pray to Heaven we may meet this bold marauder, now that our keel is ploughing our own waters," said Konrad, whose old Norwegian spirit flashed up in his bosom at the sight of his native hills. "Would I had a score of my old crossbowmen that I left behind me at Bergen, and thou with thy two culverins—"

"St. Olaf forefend!" rejoined Hans, hastily hitching up his wide chocolate-coloured inexpressibles, as he thought of his investment in wheat, and malt, and tanned leather, and the risk they would run. "I would I were safe under the batteries of our old castle of Bergen, where, please Heaven and honest Nippen, I will drop my anchor to-night. And now, Master Konrad, that once again we are in sight of *Gamle Norgé*, how meanest thou to shape thy course, and keep to the windward of misfortune? Dost thou steer for the Elbe or the Weser? There the Lubeckers and Holsteiners are every day playing at ding-dong with arquebuss and caliver."

"Thou askest, Hans, what I scarcely know how to answer. My band of crossbowmen will, of course, be still at Bergen, but the king, doubtless, will have given them another captain. Sir Erick is in his grave; and Anna, Heaven only knows where. I have nothing now to tie me to the spot I love so well," he continued, sighing, "but many sad and bitter memories, which are better committed to oblivion; so, as thou sayest, I will even wend me to the Elbe, and there follow the fortunes of the war."

"Then be it so: I can give thee a letter to Arnold Heidhammer, a certain burgomaster, which may avail thee much; and if a hundred rose nobles will be of service, thou mayest have them. For this cargo, above which we are now treading—but, ho! yonder is a sail that beareth towards us somewhat suspiciously. St. Olaf! but she shot round that promontory like a sea-gull!"

Hans sprang upon one of the culverins Konrad had referred to, and, shading his eyes with his hand (for his fur cap was minus a peak, and there were then no telescopes), he peered intently at the stranger.

"Friend Hans, what dost thou make her out to be?" asked Konrad, whose heart beat strangely.

"A great frigate, galley-rigged, with ten culverins a-side, crossbows on her forecastle, and hackbuts on her poop; full of men, too—see how many helmets are glinting in the sunshine!"

The shore was five or six miles distant. The noonday sun

shone joyously on the bright blue sea, and full upon the snow-white canvass of the approaching vessel, which was belling in the land breeze, above the tier of brass-mouthed culverins that peered from the red port-holes of the bow, waist, and her towering poop and forecastle, which were covered with a profusion of heraldic and symbolical carving and gilding. Her masts were each composed of two tall spars, having four large square sails; she had ponderous basketed tops and poop lanterns, a great square sprit-sail, under which the water that boiled against her bow, was flashing, as it wreathed and foamed in the light of the meridian sun, and bubbled under the counters of her towering stern.

Several men in armour were visible above the gunnel, and their pikes glinted as she approached, rolling over the long waves; and there was one whose suit of polished steel shone like silver, as he stood on the lofty poop.

She was still above half a mile distant, and Hans, who liked not her appearance (for he had a mortal aversion to every thing like cannon, or coats-of-mail, on board ship) crowded all sail, and stood away, right up the Fiord. Upon this a red flash broke from the tall forecastle of the stranger—a wreath of white smoke curled aloft through her thick rattlins and white canvass, and a stone bullet, that whistled over the water, cut Hans' fore-yard in the slings, and brought a ruin of splintered wood, and rope, and fluttering canvass, down upon his deck.

Deprived of her head-sails, the crayer immediately proved unmanageable; and the stranger, spreading his broad canvass more fully to the breeze, soon sheered ahead, and backing his fore-yard with an air of considerable seamanship, lay to across the bows of the *Skottefruin*.

Poor Hans now with dismay beheld a great foreign banner displayed; but though he knew it not, Konrad immediately recognised the cheverons and lions of Bothwell, and he perceived that the figure on the bow was the Earl's coroneted crest, a white horse's-head, with a gilded bridle; and one glance at the lofty sides, the grim cannon tier, and gigantic poop of the Scottish frigate, and her gunnels lined by pikemen and arquebusiers in their steel caps and coats-of-mail, sufficed to shew him that he was again completely in the power of his ancient enemy; though by what miracle he, who, when they left the Forth, seemed to have all Scotland prostrate under his hand,

should thus again be a cruiser in the Scandinavian seas, he could not comprehend.

A small boat was lowered with a splash into the water; a tall man in dark armour, whose weight nearly overset it, dropped into it, and six seamen, armed with whingers and Jedwood axes, followed, and immediately pushed off towards the vessel of the terrified Norwegian skipper, who stood as usual with his hands stuffed into his chocolate-coloured breeches, his Elsinore cap pulled over his bushy brows, his teeth set hard, and desperation in his eyes, viewing the approach of this armed and unknown enemy.

The dark knight put a foot on one of the forechain-plates, grasped the rattlius, and vaulted on board with singular agility, considering the bulk of his frame and the weight of his armour.

"Cock and pie!" he exclaimed, as he threw up his visor, and recognised both Konrad and Hans. "I find myself among acquaintances here."

"And what want ye now, Sir Knight?" said Konrad, as he threateningly grasped a handspike, the first and only weapon that lay at hand; "and how dare ye to bend cannon on a ship of the Danish king, within the Norwegian seas?"

"To the first question, Master Konrad," replied Ormiston, with mock deliberation, "as to what we want, I reply, a sight of this good skipper's invoice, for we mightily lack various things since our repulse before the harbour of Kirkwall, and an examination thereof will save us much trouble in overhauling a cargo which may consist of nought else than hazel-wands and wheelbarrows. To the second—as to why we dared to bend our cannon against thee, thou hadst better ask my Lord the Earl of Bothwell—nay, I mean James, Duke of Orkney, who dare do just whatever pleaseth himself on the land, and I see no reason why he should curb his frolicsome fancies on the open sea. By St. Paul! skipper, thou hast the very gloom of a Nordland bear; but bring up thy jar of hollands; let us drink and be friends, and then I will examine thine invoice, for I love not trifling, and lack time."

This formidable knight had all the air of a man who was to be obeyed; the unhappy Hans produced his round and capacious leathern bottle of Dutch gin, of which Ormiston, who had seated himself upon a culverin, drank a deep draught, and then handed the remainder to his boat's crew.

"Now, sirrah, for thine invoice of the victual under these hatches ; for we lack nought else."

From a tin case, concealed in the breast of his rough doublet, Hans, with trembling fingers, produced from among several others a small piece of parchment. Ormiston adjusted his steel glove, unfolded the invoice, and, after viewing it in various ways, handed it to Konrad, saying—

"I request of thee to read me this, and read it truly for thine own sake. By the mass ! I never could read much at any time, and such a cramped scrawl baffles my skill in writing, which never went much beyond making my mark on an Englishman's hide."

Aware of the futility of resistance, and feeling for the agony of poor Hans whose all was shipped on board his crayer, Konrad read the following invoice, which we give verbatim from the papers of the Magister Absalom :—

"Shippit by ye grace of God, in goode order and weel-conditioned, by Ihone Middiltoune, at the Timber Holfe, in and upon ye good shippe *Skottefruin* of Bergen, quherof Hans Knuber is maister, now lying in the harberie of Leith, bound for Bergen—to saye, 113 baggs containing aucht tons, four bollis, three lippies, and twa pecks of wheaten flour, to be delivered at Bergen, in ye like gude order (the act of God, the queen's enemies of England, fire, and all other dangeris of ye sea excepted), as customarie ; and so God send yis gude and noble shippe to her destined port in safety.—Amen.

"At Leith, ye 23d April, in ye zeir of our Lord 1567."

"Now God be with thee, thou dour carle !" said Ormiston, leaping up ; "thou hast enough and to spare of the very provender we lack most. One hundred and thirteen bags of wheaten flour ! St. Mary—I have not broken a flour bannock since we left Dunbar ! Thou must hand me over, say fifty bags of this ware, and I will make thee a free gift of the three-and-sixty other bags, with the bolls, lippies, and pecks to boot—so up with thy hatches, for our stomachs and tempers lack no delay."

It was only on hearing this that Hans seemed to shake off his lethargy, and his rage burst suddenly forth. He seized a handspike, and, grasping it with nervous hands, flourished it aloft, and planted his broad sturdy feet, which were cased in rough leather shoes, upon the hatchway, vowing to dash out the brains of the first man who approached it.

"Presumptuous fool!" said the gigantic knight, laying his hand on his sword; "were it worth while to draw, I might by one sliver cut thee in two. I have no wish to harm thee; but beware, for thou hast to deal with ruined and outlawed men, whom toil by sea—a narrow escape from a superior force, that hath pursued and driven us into these waters—starvation, and Heaven knows what more—have rendered desperate—so beware thee, Sir Skipper, or I will hang thee at thine own mast-head!"

"And who art thou, robber and pirate! that I, a free trader, should uncloze my hatches at thy bidding on the open sea?" cried Hans in broken Scottish, as he flourished his club within an inch of the speaker's nose.

"Black Hob of Ormiston, a name that would find an echo in bonny Teviotdale, Master Knuber, ha! ha!"

"And what wantest thou with my goods?"

"Nay, 'tis his grace the Duke of Orkney."

"And by whom shall I be paid?"

"The lords of the secret council at Edinburgh—ha! ha!—gif thou bringest to them our heads, thou old sea-dog! Mass! Hans Knuber, knowest thou not mine is well worth a hundred merks of silver, and that of his grace of Orkney two thousand pounds of Scottish gold. But I trifle. Back, fellow! and desire thy knaves to open the hatch and up with these wheaten bags; for, by St. Mary! my mouth waters at the thought of the bannoeks."

Rendered furious by the prospect of being jocularly plundered by marauders, for such adventures were far from uncommon on the ocean in those days of ill-defined liberty and right, the long smothered passion of Hans broke forth; and, swinging the handspike aloft, he dealt a deadly blow at the head of Ormiston, who without much effort avoided it. The stroke glanced harmlessly off his polished helmet; but, ere it could be repeated, he grasped the portly assailant like a child, and with a strength that astonished Konrad, and none more than Hans himself, lifted him over the gunnel and dropped him into the boat alongside, saying—

"Thank Heaven and thy patron, Sir Skipper, that I have not popped thee into the sea, with a bunch of cannon-balls at thy neck; yet for that rash blow I shall punish thee with a severity I meant not to practise."

Other boats now came off from the Earl's frigate; the hatches were raised, and in a few minutes fifty bags of flour, that had

grown on the corn rigs of fertile Lothian, and been ground in the mills of Leith, were transferred to the possession of Bothwell, whose outlawed crew, hollow-eyed and wolfish with long travail, danger, and scanty fare, received them with shouts of rapture—greeting each white dusty sack with a round of applause as it was hoisted on board. Last of all, Ormiston came off, bringing Hans Knuber and fourteen men who composed the crayer's crew.

“Now, sirrah,” said he sternly to Hans; “lift thy pumpkin head, and behold how I will punish thee for that dirl on the scone thou gavest me!”

Hans, whom rage and the shock of falling into the boat, had reduced to a state bordering on stupefaction, raised his heavy leaden-like grey eyes, and gazed at his crayer. The sprit-sail and fore-topsail had been hastily re-rigged and braced up—the helm lashed, to keep her head to the wind; she was again under sail, and, without a soul on board, was bearing full towards a dangerous eddy, that in those days boiled near the shore of Bergen; and Hans, as the distance increased between him and his vessel, gradually raised his hands to the ears of his fur cap, which he grasped with a tenacity that tightened as she neared the vortex, or little moskenstrom.

The rowers paused with their oars in the air, and looked back with curiosity and interest; for there was something very absorbing in the aspect of the abandoned ship, running full tilt on the career of destruction with all her sails set. Onward she went, rolling over the heavy swells caused by the waters of the fiord meeting those of the Skager Raek; the sun shone full upon her stern windows from the western hills—on her white canvass and the sparkling water that curled under her counter—and nearer and nearer she drew to the boiling eirele, that with rapidity whirled white and frothy under the brow of an almost perpendicular cliff, that was overhung by an ancient wood of drooping pine

Drawn within its influence, and dragged round by its irresistible eurrent, with sails torn, cordage snapping, and her yards flying round like those of a windmill, she was borne about in a circle that narrowed at every turn—faster and faster, deeper and deeper, round she went, till in one wild whirl, with a sound that came over the water like the sob of a drowning giant, she vanished—sucked into the watery profundity of the abyss!

CHAPTER LXVII.

BOTHWELL AND THE GREAT BEAR.

WHEN Konrad with Hans Knuber, and the fourteen Norsemen who composed his crew, were brought on board the ship of the Earl, they were immediately led towards him. Completely armed, save the helmet, which was placed upon the capstan, against which he leaned, the handsome form of Bothwell never appeared to greater advantage than when among his uncouth mariners, in their wide breeches and fur boots. His face was paler and more grave than when Konrad had last seen him; his deep dark eyes were melancholy and thoughtful; but his compressed lips and knitted brows showed a steadiness of purpose and determination of aspect, that failed not to impress the beholder. Still more pale and grave, Hepburn of Bolton stood near him, leaning on his long sword; and, among the group that pressed forward to scrutinise the prisoners, Konrad recognised the faces of French Paris, Hay of Tallo, and others of the Earl's retinue.

"What strange freak of fate hath thrown thee in my path again?" he asked, with a calm smile.

"The waves, the winds, and mine own evil destiny; for Heaven knoweth, Lord Earl, I had no desire again to see thy face," replied Konrad.

"Well, well, I cannot feel chafed by thine honest plainness, Konrad; for I know well I have given thee deep reason to hate me. A strange fatality has woven our adventures together. Thou didst save me once from the waves of this very ocean, when last for my sins I was traversing these Norwegian seas; and I saved thee twice from drowning—first in the crystal Clyde, under the windows of my own castle of Bothwell; and once again when thou wert chained like a baited bear to yonder pillar in the North Loeh of Edinburgh. But come," added the Earl, clapping him on the shoulder; "let us be friends; are the faith or falsehood of a woman matters for two brave men to quarrel about?"

Konrad, who could not conceal the repugnance he felt at the presence of the Earl, whom he hated as his rival, and Anna's

betrayed, drew back with a hauteur that stung the outlawed lord to the heart.

"Nay, Earl or Duke, for I know not which thou art—men style thee both—though but a simple gentleman of Norway, a captain of crossbowmen, with a rixmark in the day, I would not follow thy banner to obtain the noblest of thy baronies. Our paths must be far separate. I never could owe thee friendship, suit, service, or captainrie; and I have but one request to make, that thou wilt land us on the nearest point of our native shore, and we will gladly say, God speed thee on thy voyage."

"I love and esteem few, and by fewer am I loved and esteemed," replied the Earl, calmly; "but, fallen though I am, I have not yet sunk so low as to beg the friendship of any man. Be it so. Ere nightfall, I will land thee on yonder promontory, and the skipper knave likewise, though in good sooth he deserves to be hanged up at yonder yard-arm, for declining me the use of a few pitiful bags of our own Scottish wheat, when he saw my ducal banner displayed before his eyes."

With a brief reverence the Earl retired into his cabin, where French Paris attended to relieve him of part of that armour which he wore constantly; for he was in hourly expectation of being assailed—from the seaward, by ships sent in pursuit of him from Scotland—or from the land, for his piracies and plundering on the Danish and Norwegian shores.

"The raven's fate befall thee!" muttered Hans, thrusting his clenched hands farther into his pockets, and gazing with blank despair upon the vortex that, almost in sight of his haven, had swallowed up his ship.

The wind blew freshly from the fiord ahead of them, and David Wood, the Earl's skipper, found the impossibility of making the point where he desired to land their captives; and the sudden appearance of a large three-masted vessel of war, which, under easy sail, came round one of those steep headlands that overhung the water, made him bear away into the open channel; for so great was the rage and terror their depredations had spread on both sides of the Skager Rack, that the Earl knew he must greet a foe in every ship under the banner of Frederik of Denmark.

The sun had set, but the clear twilight of the long northern night played upon the dark blue waters of the fiord, which still rippled in silver against the wall-like rocks that hemmed them

in; the air was mild and balmy; the whole sky had that clear, cold blue, which it exhibits among our lowland hills before sunrise; but the northern lights, that gleamed from Iceland's snow-clad peaks, the bright pole-star, and the myriad spangles of the milky-way, were all coming forth in their glory; nothing could surpass the beauty of the former, as their rays, like the gleams of a gigantic sword, flashed along the cerulean sky, behind the wooded summits of the dark and distant hills.

"Dost thou know aught of yonder ship, Sir Skipper?" asked Bothwell of Hans Knuber, who had been observing her approach with a stern joy which he took no pains to conceal.

"Yes, I know her!" said Hans. "Ay, by St. Olaf! every plank in her hull and every rope in her rigging—for my own hands helped to nail one and reeve the other. There sails not a better craft, nor a swifter, in the Danish waters."

"A swifter!" rejoined the Earl, looking over his poop at the waves that curled under the counter. "I need care little for that, as Scottish men are unused to run either on sea or land, Master Knuber. She is a war-ship, I perceive."

"Thou art right, Lord Earl. She is the Biornen, or Great Bear, a ship of King Frederick's, carrying sixteen great carthouns, and as many demi-culverins; manned by three hundred mariners, and as many more crossbowmen and cannoniers. Christian Alborg commands—an old sea-horse as ever dipped his whiskers in salt water—Knight of the Dannebrog and Commandant of Ottenbrocht. Ha! dost thou behold?"

At that moment, the red Norwegian flag, bearing a golden lion grasping a blue battleaxe, was unfurled upon the wind; the redder flash of a cannon, gleaming across the darkening water, and the whiz of the ball, as it passed through the rigging of the Earl's ship, announced his recognition by the stranger.

Hans drew his hands out of his chocolate-coloured breeches, and capered with revenge and joy as he heard it.

The ship of Bothwell was the *Fleur-de-Lys*, a galliot carrying twenty demi-culverins, and had been one of the war-ships of James V. The Earl, as Lord High Admiral of Scotland, had all the affairs and stores of the naval force under his control, and thus selected her, with all her cannon and gear, for his own particular service, and manned her with a crew of his vassals, on whose valour and fidelity he could rely to the last of their blood and breath.

Instead of the standard of Scotland, he ordered his own great banner, bearing the ducal arms of Orkney quartered with those of Bothwell, to be again displayed at the gaff-peak ; from the mast-heads floated banneroles, bearing the three red pelicans of Ormiston, the cheverons of Bolton, the three red escutcheons of Hay of Tallo, and the pennons of other gentlemen who followed his desperate fortune ; while, enraged by the insult thus offered, in firing at once upon him, he gave immediate orders to open the gun-ports—shot the culverins—man the poop and topcastles with crossbowmen, and clear all for battle—orders which were obeyed by his people with alacrity. So now we will have to describe a sea-fight of the sixteenth century.

Both vessels were going under easy sail ; but as the Earl had resolved to give battle to his heavy antagonist, careless of the result, he gradually shortened his way, making all secure on board as the distance lessened between him and his Danish Majesty's ship. The crossbowmen, with their weapons bent and bolts laid, and the arquebusiers, with muzzles pointed and matches lit, were crouching behind the wooden parapets of the poop and forecastle, which, like those round the tops, were all fashioned in the shape of battlements ; the cannoniers stood by their culverins with linstock and rammer ; the waist of the ship bristled with steel caps, short pikes, two-handed swords, and Jedwood axes ; while on the towering poop and forecastle were seen the mail-clad figures of Bothwell and his knights ; but, notwithstanding all this display of bravery, as they neared the foe, they saw how fearful were the odds to be encountered.

Each vessel came on under topsails ; the courses being¹ auled up, displayed the steel-bristling decks, and the polished mouths of the brass cannon, that gleamed upon the dark blue water as they were run through the carved and painted sides of the gunwall (*gunnel*), loaded with bullets of stone and iron, and pebbles lapped in lead. Both vessels were now running in the same direction, but gradually neared each other. They were within three lance-lengths, and not a sound was heard on board of either but the ripple under their bows ; and in breathless silence, as the still twilight deepened on the ocean, the adverse crews continued gazing on each other.

All at once a line of lights glittered along the deck of the Norwegian.

"Yare, my hearts!" cried Wood, the Earl's skipper, "down, and save yourselves!"

Except Bothwell and his knights, every man threw himself flat on the deck; and while fire flashed from the wide muzzles of eight great cartlouns and as many demi-culverins, their shot tore across the *Fleur-de-Lys*, splintering her bulwarks, rending her rigging and canvass, but doing little other personal injury than slaying a few of the arquebusiers, who occupied the little wooden turrets with which the angles of the poop were furnished.

"A Bothwell! a Bothwell!" cried the Earl brandishing his sword; "cannoniers, to your lintstocks—crossbowmen to your duty, and show yourselves men, my rough-footed Scots. Fight bravely! for know ye, that if taken we shall all die the death of caitiffs and felons; for there is not a man among us but will hang from the yards of yonder Norseman, for so hath King Frederick sworn. Shoot aloft, and fire below; St. Bothan and on!"

A volley of cannon, crossbows, and arquebuses was poured upon the great quarter and stern of the *Biornen*, while her people were slowly and laboriously re-charging their pieces. The bolts whistled from the crossbows, the bullets whizzed from the arquebuses *à croc*, and the cannon-shot boomed as they flew over the decks, or sank with a heavy crash into the echoing hulls of the adverse ships; while, ascending from the still bosom of that narrow inlet of the ocean, the reports were reverberated like thunder, as the echoes rolled from peak to peak along those high mountains that overlooked it.

From the poops and forecastles the arquebuses maintained an incessant roar, and their bullets, each containing three ounces of lead, did deadly execution, being fired point-blank, beating great pieces of buff and mail into the bodies of those they slew.

"Yare, yare—my ycomen of the sheets and braces! Cheerily now—my timoneer!" bellowed the skipper of the *Fleur-de-Lys*, through his speaking trumpet, as he, by a rapidity of manœuvre and superior seamanship, sheered his vessel upon the larboard side of the *Biornen* in the smoke, and poured another broadside upon the Norwegians, who did not expect it from that point, and the sudden crash and slaughter filled them with alarm and irresolution.

"By St. John of the Desert!" exclaimed Bothwell, in the

excitement of the moment forgetting his assumed Protestantism, "ye do well, my true cannoniers. Shoot—shoot, and spare not! or never again will ye see the woods of Clyde, and the blooming bank of Bothwell. To it, Bolton, with thy bowmen! Shoot me down those rascal archers on their tops; for by St. Peter, who smote off the lug of a loon, I have wellnigh lost mine by their hands. Shoot—shoot, and spare not!"

A loud cheer replied to the Earl, and his vassals bent to their toil with renewed ardour and alacrity.

The decks were rapidly becoming encumbered with the dead and wounded; for there was neither accommodation nor due attendance for the latter, and so they were permitted to lie just where they fell, with their blood streaming away to leeward, and dripping from the scuppers into the ocean; while the shot ploughed and tore up the oak planking of the deck, beat down the bulwarks, rending mast and boom and spars to shreds and splinters; and each time the ponderous stone bullets of the great Danish carthouns thundered and crashed through the side of the *Fleur-de-Lys*, she staggered and trembled in every rib and plank.

"Sweep me the gunwall with your arquebuses!" cried the Earl, leaping upon the corpse-strewn forecastle, where Ormiston, like a swarthy moor, was handling one of those ponderous fire-arms as easily as a bird caliver; "for one more salvo from those accursed carthouns will hurl us from the ocean like a flash of lightning!"

"Cock and pie!" said Ormiston as he levelled the long arquebuss in its iron sling; "we have been putting pelloks into their doublets ever since the tulzie began; and I doubt not have scored a hundred by the head, but the gloomy night is increasing so fast that we aim now at random."

The darkness, as he said, had increased very much. The clouds were gathering in heavy masses, and the red sheet lightning was gleaming behind the rocky peaks of those hills, where the northern lights had been flashing one hour before. Dark as ink grew the waters of the fiord, and the increasing wind that blew down it, between the high shores on either side, flecked its surface with foam, as it passed away into the turbulent waste of the Skager Rack. This change was unseen or unheeded by the combatants, who were now lying to with their foresails backed, and pouring their missiles upon each other with a deadly

animosity, that increased as the slaughter and the darkness deepened around them together. Notwithstanding the superior size of the Norwegian ship, and the heavier metal of her cannon, the little *Fleur-de-Lys* stood to her bravely; for she was manned by bold and desperate hearts, whom outlawry and revenge had urged to the utmost pitch of rashness and valour.

Meanwhile, Konrad and Hans Knuber watched with beating hearts the varying ebb and flow of the tide of battle in which they had so suddenly been involved. They remained passive spectators, exposed to the fire of their friends and countrymen, by whose hands they expected every instant to be decimated or decapitated. Whenever a barbed crossbow-shot from the Biornen struck down a poor Scottish mariner to writhe in agony and welter in his blood, or when a shot tore up plank and beam almost beneath his feet, Hans growled a Norse malediction, and thought of the ruin these Scots had that day brought upon him. Suddenly he grasped Konrad by the hand, and pointed to a part of the water that appeared covered with white froth.

"Seest thou that, Master Konrad?—hah!" he exclaimed.

"The lesser moskenstrom—the eddy that swallowed up thy ship. God shield us!" said Konrad; "for we are just upon its verge."

"Those accursed Scots perceive it not; but Christian Alborg doth. See, he hath hauled his wind and braced up his foreyard—another moment will see us sucked into the whirl, or stranded on the shoal made between us and the coast by the eddy, ha! ha!" and Hans, who was pale as death under the influence of wrath and fear, laughed like a hyena at the terrors about to replace those of the battle.

A shout of triumph burst from the little crew of Bothwell's shattered ship; but it was answered by one of derision and exultation from the Norwegian; for at that moment, as Hans had predicted, the *Fleur-de-Lys* bilged upon the reef or rocky shoal that lay between the eddy and the shore—striking with a crash that made her foremast bend like a willow wand ere it went by the board, bringing down the main-topmast; the heavy culverins went surging all to leeward, and, crashing away the bulwarks, plunged into the sea, which, being agitated by the increasing gale, broke in foam upon the ridgy summit of the reef, and hurled its breakers over the parting frame of the *Fleur-de-Lys*, which thus in a moment became a shattered and desolate wreck.

The shout of the Norsemen was their last display of hostility ; for, on beholding the terrible trap into which the foe had so suddenly fallen, the gallant old Knight of the Dannebrog suspended his firing, and lowered his boats to pick up the survivors of the battle and wreck ; for so fierce was the tumult of water that boiled around her, and so great his dread of the whirlpool, that he continued rather to stand off than towards the scene of the catastrophe.

The towering forecastle of the bilged ship was highest above the water, and to that Konrad, after seeing poor Hans Knuber washed from his side, to be dashed again and again a lifeless corpse upon the brow of the reef, clung with all the energy of despair, clambering up step by step, clutching the ruin of spars and cordage that hung over it, till he reached the iron rail enclosing the top, which he embraced with both arms, and looked down upon the scene of terror and desolation presented by the lower half of the wreck, which was submerged in water.

Fitfully the white moon gleamed upon it, through the openings in the hurrying clouds ; its cold lustre rather adding to, than lessening, the ghastly horror of the wreck and reef.

Far down in the deep waste, which was full of water—for every instant the surf broke over it in mountains of foam—was a swarm of struggling men, many of them in armour, clinging to whatever would support them. Ever and anon they sent forth cries of terror and despair ; while every plank and spar creaked and groaned as the waves beat and lashed around, as if eager to overwhelm and engulf them all.

The wind was increasing, and, urged by the long fetch of the Skager Rack, the waves broke in stupendous volumes over the reef and the bilged wreck, at every return washing away some unfortunate into the abyss of the whirlpool, that yawned and foamed and growled on one side ; while on the other lay the wide waste of the ocean, and the Biornen about a mile distant, with her white canvass gleaming, like the garments of a spirit, in the light of the fitful moon. Behind the reef towered up the black Norwegian hills, like a wall of steep and frowning rock, fringed by nodding pines, and bordered by a white line of froth, that marked where the breakers reared their fronts to lash and roar upon the impending cliffs—but all these were buried in the long and sombre shadow which the tremendous bluffs threw far on the restless sea.

Meanwhile, Bothwell and his knights, though landmen, and more at home in the tiltyard, in the tavern, the castle hall, or on the mountain side, never for a moment lost their presence of mind. Throwing off the heavier parts of their armour, they contrived to secure one of the boats, into which the Earl, with Ormiston, Bolton, Hay of Tallo, French Paris, and several others, sprang with all the speed that fear of a terrible fate could lend them.

"A Bothwell! a Bothwell!" cried the Earl waving his hand, as the light shallop was one moment buoyed aloft like a cork, and the next plunged down into the deep, dark trough of the midnight sea. "Save yourselves by spars and booms, my brave hearts!" he cried to those whom his heart bled to leave behind—but it was impossible that one boat could save them all; "or lash yourselves to the wreck, and we will return for you."

"Bend to your oars, my stout knaves, cheerily," cried Wood, the skipper.

"Yare!" added Ormiston, whose tall figure loomed in the labouring shallop like that of an armed giant; "cheerily, ho! for if it is our fate to be hanged we will never be drowned."

"Hold!" exclaimed the Earl, as they pulled under the lee of the lofty poop, yonder is one whom I would rather die than leave behind to perish, for then I would forfeit mine honour."

"Cock and pie! Lord Earl, art thou mad?" cried Ormiston, in great wrath; "is this a time to have thy qualms about honour, when ten minutes more may see us all in the pit of hell?"

"Peace, peace; shame on thee, laird of Ormiston!" cried David Wood. "Mother of God, watch over us!"

"Hob, peace with thy blasphemy!" said the Earl, "or I will have thee cast into the sea. Is this a time for such dreadful thoughts as thine? By the bones of my father, I *shall* save him. Ho, there! Konrad of Saltzberg, I pledged my word to land thee on thy native shore, and even in this moment of dread I will redeem it, or perish with thee. Leap with a bold heart, and a ready will, and gain our boat if thou canst, albeit that it is laden so heavily."

Aware that the chance was a last one, Konrad, who could swim like a duck, sprang at once into the waters of his native fiord, and, rising a short distance from the boat, was pulled in by the athletic Ormiston. Then the oars were dipped in the

frothy water, and, urged by wind and tide, the laden boat shot away from the desolate wreck.

At that moment a wild shriek—the last despairing cry of the strong and the brave, who had never flinched when the arrow flew and the culverin boomed around them—ascended from the seething ocean to the sky; the wreck parted into a thousand fragments, that covered the face of the water; and these, with the poor fellows who clung to them with the blind tenacity of despair and death, were again and again, at the sport of the waves, dashed against the ridgy summits, that were one moment visible in terrible array in the moonlight, and the next were hidden, as a mountain of foam swept over them, hurrying into the deep vortex of the whirlpool the last fragments and the corpses of the *Fleur-de-Lys*.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

CHRISTIAN ALBORG.

“WHICH way, Lord Earl?” asked the Laird of Bolton.
“Steer we shoreward?”

“Nay!” cried Ormiston, in his usual tone of banter, for now his spirits rose as the danger lessened; “nay—a malison on thee, Norway! Woe worth the day I again set foot on thy devilish shore, where there is nought but bran-bannocks and sour beer in summer, and bears’ hams with toasted snowballs in winter!”

“To yonder ship?” continued Hepburn.

“Yes!” replied the Earl. “Row briskly, my merry men; she hath altered her course, and stands towards us. We must yield; but my mind misgives me sorely, that we shall have but sorry treatment.”

A few minutes’ pulling brought them under the lee of the lofty Norwegian ship—a ladder was lowered, and the Earl and his attendants sprang fearlessly on board. They immediately found themselves surrounded by a crowd of savage-looking Norwegian seamen and Danish soldiers, the former in garments of singular fashion, and the latter wearing armour of an age at least two centuries older than their own. Their red bushy beards protruded from their little steel caps, and flowed over their gour-

gerins, as they leaned upon their iron mauls, chain maces, and the bolls of their slackened bows, and gazed with wild eyes on the strangers who thus voluntarily yielded themselves prisoners.

The whole group were immediately led to the summit of the lofty poop, where the captain stood surrounded by his officers; and Bothwell could perceive, by many a splintered plank and battered boom—by many a torn rope and shattered block—by spots of blood, and broken heads, and bandaged arms, that the Biornen had not come off scatheless in the late encounter.

The Norwegian captain was a fat and pompous little man; his round bulbous figure was clad in a quilted doublet of fine crimson cloth, the gold lacing of which shone in the light of three large poop-lanterns that were blazing close by; his short, thick legs were covered by yellow silk stockings; he wore a thick ruff that came up to his ears, and a beaver hat nearly four feet in diameter; his moustaches were preposterously long, and he rolled his saucer-eyes in a way that was very appalling, as the Earl stepped up to him, and, in no degree abashed by the magnificence of his portly presence, raised his blue velvet bonnet, saying in French as he bowed gracefully—

“I believe I have the honour of addressing the knight Christian Alborg, captain of his Danish Majesty’s galley the Biornen?”

“Yes!” replied the captain gruffly; “and what art thou?”

“Boatswain of the Scottish ship.”

“And where is the pirate, thy master?”

“He stands before thee,” replied the Earl, pointing to David Wood; for he was anxious to preserve an incognito which he hoped his disordered attire might favour.

“Thou hast but little the air of a shipman,” rejoined the captain of the Biornen incredulously; “and I think that, were this knave thy leader, *he* would have addressed me, and not *thou*. So, sirrah, art thou really captain of that ship which dared to abide my cannon in the Danish seas?”

“Yes!” replied Wood boldly; “and how darest thou, Sir Captain, to doubt the word of a true Scottishman?”

“Because I would save thee, if I could, from the doom such an acknowledgment merits—away with him to the yard-arm!”

And in another moment, almost ere a word could be spoken or a hand raised in his defence, a rope was looped round the neck of David Wood, and he was run up to the arm of the main yard, where he hung, quivering and writhing in the moonlight

while his last half-stifled shriek tingled in the ears of his companions, who were silenced and appalled by a catastrophe so sudden.

"By St. Paul! my poor skipper," thought the Earl, "if thou farest so for telling the truth, how shall I fare for telling a falsity? Knave of a Norseman! thou hast destroyed the cadet of a gallant race—the line of Bonnington, in Angus!"

"Hah! this is not the bearing of a Scottish boatswain," said old Christian Alborg, stepping back a pace at the menacing aspect of his prisoner; "and now, I bethink me that such wear neither corselets of steel nor spurs of gold; so tell me who thou art, or, by the hand of the king, I will run thee up at the other arm of yonder yard! Thy name?"

"James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell, and Duke of Orkney, Knight of the Thistle, and Governor of the Kingdom of Scotland!" replied the Earl, drawing himself up with an aspect of dignity and pride, that was not lost upon the portly Norseman and his helmeted officers.

"Unhappy lord!" replied Christian Alborg, making a profound reverence; "I have heard of thine evil fame, and envy thee not the grandeur of thy titles."

"Thou sayest truly," said Bothwell, in a tone of sadness, "I am not to be envied; but withhold thy pity, for I am not yet fallen so low as to find commiseration acceptable from any man."

"But if thou art governor of the kingdom of Scotland, what brought thee into these seas?"

"Foul wind, or fatality—which you will."

"And wherefore hast thou sacked the villages, stormed the castles, plundered the ships of thine own countrymen, who have done thee no wrong, and also committed innumerable piracies on the subjects of his Danish Majesty, with whom thy people are at peace?"

"Because of my sore extremity!"

"That will form but a lame excuse to King Frederick, at whose palace of Kiøbenhavn the tidings of thine outrages were sent from his castle of Bergenhuis, whither I have an order to convey thee, dead or alive. Though a bold man and a bad one, thou hast fought as became a Scottish noble, and I can respect valour wherever I find it. I had resolved to chain thee neck and heels, like a villainous pirate; but trusting to thine honour, that thou wilt not attempt to compromise me by escaping, I

will permit thee to retain thy sword, to be at liberty, and to receive all due courtesy, till thou art committed to the custody of the King's garrison at Bergen."

The Earl was led to a cabin, and there left to his own melancholy reflections, which were rendered a hundred degrees worse by the reaction consequent to such a day of stirring activity and wild excitement.

He heard the ripple of the water as the waves that had swallowed up his companions flowed past; he heard the straining of the timbers, the creaking of the decks and cordage, as the wind bellied the full spread canvass of the Biornen, and urged her up the fiord of Bergen; but his thoughts were far away in the land he had left behind him, in the island tower of that lonely lake, overlooked by steep hills and girdled by the guarding water, where Mary of Scotland mourned in crownless captivity the shame, the contumely, and the hopeless fate *his* wiles and ambition had brought upon her.

CHAPTER LXIX.

THE CASTELLANA.

NEXT day the Biornen cast anchor in the Jelta fiord. and, under a strong guard of crossbowmen, Christian Alborg carried Konrad and his prisoners ashore in a great red pinnace which bore the yellow lion of Norway floating at its stern.

They landed about half a mile from the citadel, to which he was conveying the captives, and Konrad accompanied them, for he knew not where else to bestow himself; but every step of the well-known way was full of bitter memories, and fraught with the idea of Anna.

And where was she?

Of Christian Alborg, who had conveyed her from Scotland, he never made an inquiry; for though he knew perfectly well that it was he who had received her from the Scottish council, he had no opportunity of an interview; and, on the other hand, Alborg knew not how deep was the young man's interest still in the fate of Anna, though he knew his story well; and thus no communication on the subject passed between them.

In all their old familiar features, his native hills were towering

around that ancient fortress, which tradition averred to have been the work of the Sitonian giants; while, amid the deep recesses of their woods, the distant cry of the wolf was ringing as of old, and the wiry foliage of the Scandinavian pines, when they vibrated in the summer wind, as the Norse say, filled the air with the music of fairy harps, that mingled with the hum of the evening flies, and the rustle of the long reedy grass, as it waved in the rising wind like the surface of a rippled lake.

Every old familiar feature brought back its own sad train of memories. By the winding path they traversed, here and there lay an ancient runic monument, covered with uncouth characters, and those fantastic hieroglyphics with which the ancient Scandinavians handed down to posterity the history of their battles, and of the mighty men of the days of other years. There, too, was the ancient chapel of St. Olaus, still perched in a cleft of the mountains, with its bell swinging on the rocks that overhung it—rocks where the wild myrtle, the geranium, and the yellow pansy, all flourished together in one luxuriant blush of flowers.

As they ascended from the shore, the rocks became bolder and bolder, more sterile and abrupt; not a blade of grass waved on their basaltic faces, yet from their summits the tall and aged pines locked their branches together, and excluded the daylight from the deep chasm at the bottom of which the roadway wound.

Rents in the volcanic rock afforded at times, far down below, glimpses of the narrow fiord, a deep, blue inlet of the ocean, dotted with white sails, and overlooked by the strong, dark tower of Bergen, with its rude and clustering ramparts, little windows, and loopholes for arrows.

As they approached, Konrad's sadness increased; for every stone in its walls seemed like the face of an old friend, and every feature of the scenery was associated with that first and early love which had become part of his very being.

With Bothwell it was quite otherwise.

He looked around him with the utmost nonchalance, and scarcely thought of Anna, though the scene was quite enough to bring her fully back to his mind; but his passion for Mary had completely absorbed or obliterated every other fancy, feeling, and sentiment.

A change had come over his features; his forehead was paler and more thoughtful, his eyes had lost much of their bold and reckless expression, and there was a decided melancholy in his

fine face, which excited the interest of all who regarded him. He had become more taciturn; even Hob Ormiston had lost much of his loquacity, and now, depressed by the gloomy prospect of their fortunes, walked in silence by the side of the dejected and miserable Hepburn of Bolton.

"Captain Alborg," said Bothwell, "whither dost thou wend with us now?"

"To the royal castle of Bergen—to the hereditary governor of which I must deliver thee."

"Thank Heaven! 'tis not Erick Rosenkrantz who holds command there now, or I warrant me we would have had but a short shrift, and shorter mercy, for the trick I now remember me to have played him. I marvel much what manner of person this new castellan may be; for, in sooth, much of our comfort, in this most dolorous case, depends thereon."

"Be under no apprehension, Lord Earl," replied Alborg; "you are the king's prisoners, and, though accused of invasion and piracy, no castellan in Denmark or Norway can hang or quarter you without the king's express orders."

"Hang!" grumbled Ormiston; "hang thee, thou old sea-horse! Dost forget thou speakest to James, Duke of Orkney, the mate of Mary of Scotland?"

The family of Rosenkrantz were hereditary governors of Bergen, and castellans of Bergenhus, and, as Konrad's ancestors had always followed their banner in battle, he had ever considered the castle of Bergen his home; and, with all the feeling of a returned exile, he approached its massive portal, which was flanked by broad round towers, and overhung by a strong portcullis of jagged and rusted iron, where the crossbowmen of his own Danish band were still keeping guard in their scarlet gaberdines and steel caps.

At the gate they were received by Cornelius Van Dribbel, the great butler of Bergen, who, in his flutter and pomposity at the unusual arrival of such a goodly band of prisoners and visitors, never once recognised the careworn Konrad, who was too spirit-broken to address him, and, disguised by the altered fashion of his beard and garments, was borne with the throng towards the great hall, where the superior of the fortress was to receive them.

There was a flush on Bothwell's brow, a fire in his eye, a scorn on his lip, and a loftiness in his bearing, that increased as

he approached the presence of this Norwegian dignitary; for, all unused to the humility of his position, he had resolved to requite pride with pride, scorn with scorn; and thus, modelling their looks by those of their leader, Hob Ormiston and Hay of Tallo assumed an air of sullen defiance; but the young knight of Bolton, who was utterly careless about his ultimate fate, wore a spirit-broken aspect, more nearly allied to that of Konrad.

"Cornelius Van Dribbel," said Christian Alborg, puffing and blowing, as he seated himself in a capacious chair on entering the hall, and wiped his great polished head with a handkerchief, "I thought thou saidst the castellan was here to receive the king's prisoners?"

"St. Olaus forefend!" replied Van Dribbel; "surely thou knowest that the knight Rosenkrantz hath lain in his last home at Fredericksborg these many months."

"Smite thee! yes," growled the seaman; "but I meant the new castellan."

"We have none but such as thou shalt see in time—Ha! lo you, now!" he added, as the arras concealing the archway, which, at the lower end of the hall, opened upon a carpeted dais, was withdrawn, and when again it fell, Anna Rosenkrantz, attended by Christina Slingebunder and another young maiden, stood before them.

Had a spectre appeared there, Bothwell and Konrad could not have appeared more disturbed, and Anna was equally so; but the Earl, now less animated by love, and, as a courtier, being habituated to keep his emotions under restraint, was the first to recover himself, and a smile of scornful surprise spread over his face, as he doffed his bonnet and bowed to the lady of the castle.

Poor Konrad grew pale as death; he became giddy and breathless; and shrank behind the shadow of a column against which he leaned, for the atmosphere seemed stifling.

Meanwhile Anna stood upon the dais, between two massive columns of gothic form, encrusted with old runic stones. She was looking pale, but beautiful as ever. Her tresses were gathered up in the simple fashion of the north, and, supported by a silver bodkin, formed a coronet of plaits, as they were wreathed round her head. Her dress of blue silk was massive with embroidery and silver fringe, and her stomacher was studded with jewels, as became the heiress of Welsöo and Bergenhuis.

The Earl's first reflection, was his being now a captive, and completely in the power of an enraged and slighted woman, whom in the zenith of his power he had treated with cruelty, contumely, and contempt. These thoughts brought with them no qualm, no pity. He felt only apprehension for what she might now in turn make him endure; for, when in Italy and France, he heard many a tale of "woman's vengeance," that now came back full and vividly on his memory.

"By St. Paul! we find kenned faces wherever we go," said Ormiston to Bolton; "this old sea-dog hath brought us to the right haven. We will have free-house and free-hold here, I doubt not."

"Madam," said the stout captain of the Biornen, bowing as low as his great paunch and long basket-hilted espadone would permit him, "allow me to introduce to you the terrible pirate who, for the last month, has been the terror of our Fiords, and the scourge of the Sound, and whom we find to be no other than the great Earl of Bothwell, with whose astounding misdeeds all Europe has been ringing."

Anna scarcely heard a word of the captain's address. On first beholding the Earl, she had trembled violently, and then became pale as death. Her eyes filled with fire, and she regarded him with a long, fixed, and serpent-like gaze, that even he had some trouble in meeting.

"Well, madam," said he, with one of his graceful smiles, "when last we stood together in this hall, we foresaw not the day when we would greet each other thus."

"The meeting is as unexpected to me as our last may have been to *you*, my Lord Earl," replied Anna in French, but with admirable hauteur and firmness. "So, pirate and outlaw, as I now understand thee to be, thou hast lived to see all thy wild visions and schemes of ambition crumble and fade away, and now thou art a captive in the power of her thou didst so deeply wrong, and so cruelly insult."

"True, madam," replied Bothwell, curling his moustache, "and what then?"

"Dost thou not know that thy life and liberty are alike in my power?"

"I am glad of it, being assured that they could not be in safer keeping."

"Oh, man! cold and heartless as thou art," said Anna, who

seemed now to have forgotten her own infatuated passion for the Earl, "I cannot but admire this stately calmness under a reverse of fortune so terrible. Were thy fate fully in mine own hands, I would return thee to the land from whence thou hast fled, leaving the flames of civil war to rage behind thee—to the arms of her thou didst love and win, so fatally for herself—or I would again commit thee to the wide ocean, to follow thy wayward fate on other shores; for now there can neither be over nor loyalty, nor falsehood nor truth, between us—but the will of the king sayeth nay!"

"And what sayeth the will of Frederick?" asked Bothwell, with proud surprise.

"That thou and thy followers must be separated."

"Hoh, is it so?"

"They, to be sent home to Scotland—thou, to his castle of Kiøbenhavn, in fetters."

"Fetters!" cried the Earl, in a voice of thunder, while his eyes flashed fire and his hand grasped his sword. "This to Bothwell? Woman! what hast thou dared to say? Dost thou forget that I am a Scottish duke—the consort of a queen—the governor of a kingdom?"

"No!" replied Anna bitterly, while her eyes flashed with rage and jealousy, though every sentiment of love was long since dead; "and neither have I forgotten that thou art a regicide and a betrayer, who from this hour shall have meted out to him the stern measures he so ruthlessly dealt to others. Christian Alborg—this man is the king's prisoner, whom we have warrants from Peder Oxe, the marshal of Denmark, to detain. Away with him to the Biørnen, and ere sunset be thou out of the Jelta fiord, and under sail for Kiøbenhavn! Thou knowest Frederick, and that he brooks no delay."

And with a glance, where spite and jealousy were mingled with a sentiment of pity and admiration, Anna withdrew; and, as the arras fell behind her, a party of red-bearded Danish bowmen, who formed the garrison at Bergen, crowded round the Earl.

"Ha! ha!" he laughed bitterly through his clenched teeth; "there spoke thy woman's vengeance, Anna!"

"Lord Earl," said Ormiston gravely, "in the name of the master of mischief, what prompted thee to beard her thus? Foul fall thee! Why didst thou not flatter, and cajole, and

feign thine old love? To fleech with the devil, when thou canst not fight him, is ever good policy. An old love is easily revived; she is only a woman, and would doubtless have believed thee, for thou hast a tongue that would wile the gledes out of the sky. Cock and pie! Bothwell, till something better came to hand, thou mightest have been castellan of Bergen, and I thy lieutenant. All our fortunes had been made even here, in this land of barked bannocks and snowballs."

"To feign thus, would be to commit foul treason against her whom I will ever remember with loyalty and love, while Heaven permits me to live. Here we part at last, stout Hob, perhaps to meet no more. If ever again thou tradest on Scottish ground, remember that in serving *her* thou servest Bothwell. Farewell to thee, Bolton, thou man of gloomy thoughts; and farewell thou, stout Hay of Tallo; for I fear me much, that God's vengeance for *that night* in the Kirk-of-Field is coming surely and heavily upon us all."

They were rudely separated.

Ormiston, Bolton, and Tallo, raised their bonnets with sadness and respect as the Earl was led off; for the bonds of old feudality, and love, and service, which knit their names and fortunes together, had been strengthened by a certainty that the terrible career on which they had run, had for ever cut them off and isolated them from the rest of mankind; and thus a feeling of loneliness and desolation fell upon their hearts, as their great leader and master-spirit was led away to that mournful captivity which was to end only in the—grave.

That night a Scottish ship of war, which was commanded by two knights of distinction, and had been sent by the Earl of Moray in pursuit of Bothwell, anchored in the Jelta fiord, and to their care were consigned the shipwrecked followers of the captive noble; and soon after these knights set sail for Scotland.

But many hours before they had come into Bergen, the Biorren had vanished from that narrow inlet of the ocean, and was bearing the great Scottish captive along the shores of Western Gotthland, and breasting the frothy waves of the Cattgat.

The sun, as he set in the western ocean, shed a mellow light upon the wide expanse of shore that stretched upon their lee—on many an impending cliff, on the dark summits of which waved the old primeval pines of Scandinavia, and on whose

dases the waters of the west were dashing in foam—on many a wooded wilderness, amid the recesses of which the wolves were prowling by the Druid stones of Loda, and the long-forgotten grave of many a gothic chief.

Buried in reverie, with folded arms and saddened eyes, Bothwell watched the changing features and windings of that foreign shore, with all its pathless woods, volcanic rocks, and dark blue hills, throwing their deepening shadows on each other, as the burning sun sank in the distant sea, and the dusky tints of night shed upon the scenery a gloom in unison with his own dark thoughts and bitter memories.

Bitter and sad they were truly ; but how unavailing !

Now separated from the evil influence of Ormiston and others, he deplored his wickedness and folly with an intensity that amounted to agony. Had the universe been his, he would have given it that he might live the last year of his life over again, with the experience in his mind of what the guilt, the horrors, the anxieties, and remorse of that year had been.

With sorrow, with envy, yea, with agony, he looked back to the position he had held in the estimation of others, and of himself ; and felt, in the bitterness of his soul, that the emulgence could never more be *re-won*.

Never more, never more ! It was a terrible reflection !

He thought, too, of the native land he might never see again ; and—

“Of many a tale of love and war
That mingled with the scene ;
Of Bothwell's bank that bloom'd so dear,
And Bothwell's bonny Jean.”

But he thought of Anna only with anger, for no human heart could ever contain two loves. Jane Gordon he remembered with feelings of compunction, when he mused on her unrequining gentleness and devoted love ; but he thought most of Mary, and, forgetting that he was himself a captive, laid many a wild and futile scheme to free and to avenge her.

He could not flee from his own thoughts. They *would* come again and again, weighing like an incubus upon his mind, alike on the bright sunshine of noon and the solemn silence of night ; amid the heedless revelry of the Norwegian officers he longed for solitude, and in solitude the stings of conscience drove him back to revelry and wine ; and thus the deep and morbid horror

that hour by hour, and day by day had everywhere pursued him, settled down like a cloud of darkness on his soul.

Long since satiated with pleasure, sick of ambition, and wearied of the world, he now found how deep were the stings of unavailing regret.

The day, we have said, went down, and night spread her spangled mantle on the darkened water and the moonlit sea.

Brightly in its calm beauty the evening star arose from the dark-heaving line of the northern ocean, and Bothwell thought of *the time* when he had last watched that orb expanding on the night, as it rose above the ruined spire of St. Mary-in-the-Field.

At that moment, *a cry*—that seemed to be wafted over the surface of the water—made his ears and heart tingle, as it passed away on the skirt of the hollow wind.

Bothwell grew ghastly pale, he covered his ears with his hands, and rushed away to his cabin in despair.

CHAPTER LXX.

THE VAIN RESOLUTION.

CHRISTIAN ALBORG had departed with his prisoners; and, unnoticed and uncared for, Konrad stood in the hall, where he had once been so welcome a guest. A sensation of loneliness and bitterness ran through his mind. There was the chair of the old knight Rosenkrantz, with his sword and long leather gloves hung upon it, just as he had last left them; his walking-cane stood in a corner, and his furred boots were beside it; the place was identified with his presence—full of his memory; and his bluff round figure, in his ample red gaberdine and trunk hose, his kind old face, with its mild blue eyes and fair bushy beard, seemed to flit between the shadowy columns of the ancient hall.

Konrad had no intention of remaining in a place where all was so changed to him; but ere he turned to leave it for ever, he paused a moment irresolutely. Since last he stood there, all that had passed appeared like a dream, but a sad and bitter one. His heart melted within him at the very thought of his own

desolation ; a shower of tears would have relieved him, but he had none to shed, for his eyes felt dry and stony.

"Why should I remain here, where not one is left to care for me now?" he said with a smile, as if in scorn of the weakness that made him linger, and, turning away, was about to retire, when a sound arrested him; once more the arras rose and fell, and Anna stood before him. He gazed upon her without the power of utterance.

She was alone.

With a heightened colour in her cheek, and a charming timidity in her eye, she approached, and, touching his arm, said—

"Christina told me thou wert here, Konrad; and wouldst thou go without one greeting—one farewell—to me?"

Her accents sank into his inmost soul; he trembled beneath her touch, and felt all his resolution melting fast away.

"Unkind Konrad!" said she, with one of her sad but most winning smiles, "is this the friendship thou didst vow to me at Westeray?"

"I have learned, Anna, that love can never be succeeded by friendship. It runs to the other extreme—the impulses of the human heart cannot pause midway."

"Thou hast learned to hate me, then?"

"Heaven forbid!" replied Konrad, clasping his hands; "hate thee, Anna? oh, no!"

His eyes were full of the sweetness and ardour of the days of their first love, and Anna's filled with tears.

"I have long wished," she faltered, in a low and broken voice, while seating herself on the bench of one of those deeply-recessed windows near them—"I have long wished to see thee once more," she repeated, without raising her timid eyes, "to implore—not thy pardon, dear Konrad, for that I have no right to expect—but—that thou wilt not remember me with bitterness——"

Konrad muttered something—he knew not what.

"I feel, Konrad, that I owe thee much for all I have made thee suffer; and I have now seen the worth and faith of thy heart when contrasted with mine own, and I blush for my weakness—my wickedness—my folly. Thou mayest deem this unwomanly—indelicate; but in love we are equal, and why may not one make reparation as the other—I as well as thou? I have

lived, I say, to learn the value of the heart that loved me so well, and which, in a moment of frenzy—infatuation—O dearest Konrad ! call it what thou wilt—I forsook for another—another who betrayed me by a semblance of religious rites—oh ! spare me the rest !”

“Anna,” said Konrad, in a choking voice, as he rose to retire—but, instead, drew nearer to her ; “though my eye may be hollow, my cheek pale, and my heart soured and saddened, its first sentiment for thee hath never altered. Anna—Anna, God knoweth that it hath not ! For all thou hast made me endure for the past two years—from my heart—from my soul, I forgive thee, and I pray that thou mayest be happy. Anna—dearest Anna—I am going far away from the hills and woods of Bergen, to join the Lubeckers, or perhaps the Knights of Rhodes in their warfare in the distant East, for I have doomed myself to exile ; but I still regard thee as I did, when we were in yon far isle of Westeray—as my sister—as my friend. As we first met in this old castle hall, when thou wert but a guileless girl and I a heedless boy, so shall we now part. All is forgotten—all is forgiven. And now—farewell ; may the mother of God bless thee !”

He kissed her hand, and his tears fell upon it ; he turned to leave the hall, but a giddiness came over him, and a film overspread his eyes.

He still felt the hand of Anna in his : another moment, and she sank upon his breast. All her love for him had returned ; and all her womanly delicacy, and overweening pride, had given way before the more tender and generous impulses this sudden reunion with her early lover had called up within her.

“Oh, Konrad !” she whispered, while almost suffocated by her tears, “if my heart, though seared and saddened, is still prized by thee, it is thine, as in the days of our first love.”

And, borne away by his passion, the forgiving Konrad pressed her close and closer to his breast. “And here,” sayeth the Magister Absalom in his quaint papers, “here endeth the most important Boke in this our Historie.”

CHAPTER LXXI.

RETRIBUTION.

THE summer wore away—and the winter approached.

By order of Frederick II., the conqueror of the Ditmarsians, Bothwell had been transmitted, heavily ironed—an insult under which his proud spirit writhed in agony—from the great castle of Kiøbenhavn to that of Malmö, a strong and gloomy fortress on the Swedish coast, washed by the waters of the Sound, and overlooking a little town then possessed by the Danes.

There he was kept, in sure and strict ward, by a knight named Beirn Gowes, captain of Malmö and governor of Draxholm, in a vaulted apartment, with windows grated, and doors sheathed with iron, grooved in the enormous granite walls, to prevent escape: and there, the long and weary days, and weeks, and months rolled on in dull and unchanging monotony.

Of those stirring events that were acting at home he knew nothing, for never a voice fell on his ear in that far-northern prison; and thus he heard not of Mary's escape from the isle of Lochleven—her futile flight to seek succour of the false Elizabeth, and that she, too, was pining a captive in the castle of Nottingham. He knew not that all his sounding titles, and those old heraldic honours which, by their good swords, his brave forefathers had acquired, and borne on their bucklers through many a Scottish battle-field, had been gifted away with his lordly castles, his fertile fiefs, and noble baronies, to the upholders of the new *régime*—the Lords of the Secret Council. Of the fury of the Douglas wars—of Moray's death and Lennox's fall—of Morton's power and pride, his lust and wrath, under which the capital languished and the country writhed. Of all these he heard not a word; for he was utterly forgotten and deserted by all. Even Jane of Huntly, his countess, that gentle being who had once loved him so well, after their divorce had soon learned to forget him in the arms of her former lover, the Earl of Sutherland, and to commit to oblivion that she had once been the happy bride of the splendid Bothwell.

He knew not, too, of the terrible vengeance that ha allen, upon his numerous adherents—how their heads were bleaching on the battlements of Edinburgh—how their castles were ruined

their families forfeited, their names proscribed; while James, Earl of Morton, the mainspring and prime mover of all these plots and conspiracies, of which his (Bothwell's) frantic love and mad ambition had made him the too ready tool, was flourishing, for a brief term, in unrestricted pride and plenitude of power, as Regent and Governor of Scotland.

Black Hob of Ormiston, Bolton, Hay of Tallo, with French Paris and others, who had been transmitted by Anna Rosenkrantz to Scotland, were solemnly arraigned as traitors and regicides before the supreme legal tribunal at Edinburgh, and sentenced to be decapitated and quartered.

In that grated chamber of the old tower of Holyrood, in which Konrad had been confined, young Hepburn of Bolton sat counting the minutes that yet remained to him between time and **eternity.**

The hand of retribution had come heavily upon him.

That day he had seen his three companions led forth to die—to be dismembered as traitors, to have their bowels torn out from their half-strangled and yet breathing bodies, and their limbs fixed to the ramparts of the city barriers; and that day, with sorrow and contrition, he had confessed to the ministers of Moray all his share in Bothwell's plots and crimes.

As if in mockery of his sad thoughts, bright through the iron grating streamed the setting sunlight in all the beauty of a warm, autumnal eve.

At that sunset he gazed long and fixedly, for it was the last he would ever behold, and the tears filled his sunken eyes and bedewed his faded cheek, for more lovely was that evening sun than ever he had seen it, as, sinking behind the long ridge of the Calton, it cast a farewell gleam on the old rood spire and abbey towers of Holyrood—on the hills of emerald green and rocks of grey basalt that overhang them—on the woods of Restalrig, and the narrow glimpse of the blue and distant ocean beyond them—and he felt that on all this his eyes were about to be closed for ever.

For ever! did his mind recoil at this terrible reflection? No; but it often trembled between the depth of thought and the abyss of despair.

Better it was to die, than to linger out a life, haunted by the burning recollection of those crimes, upon which the force of

circumstances, rather than any evil propensity of his own, had hurried him.

And Mariette—since the hour when first he knew her love was lost, he had felt comparatively happy, to what he had been since that terrible night on which he took such vengeance upon her, and on her kingly lover, in the house of the Kirk-of-Field—that vengeance for which he was now to die.

As he mused on all his blighted hopes and blasted prospects—of what he was and what he might have been—the young man groaned aloud in the agony of his soul; he wreathed his hands among his heavy dark-brown hair, and bowed his head upon the hard wooden bench, which served him alike for bed and table.

The sunlight died away—the gloaming came, and the walls of the old abbey, within whose aisles the dead of ages lay, looked dark and dreary; the silence of his prison increased, and a deep reverie—a stupefaction—fell upon the mind of Bolton.

A hand that touched his shoulder lightly aroused him; he looked up, and saw—could it be possible?

Mariette!

“Oh no! it is a spectre!” he muttered, and covered his face with his hands. Again he ventured to look up, and the same figure met his eye, the same face was gazing sadly upon him. The features—for he summoned courage to regard them fixedly—were indeed those of the Mariette Hubert he had loved so well; but the bloom of **their** beauty had fled; her dark French eyes had lost their lustre and vivacity; her cheeks their roses, and her lips their smiles.

Her countenance was full of grief, and expressed the most imploring pity. Hepburn gazed steadily upon her; and though for a moment he deemed her a supernatural vision, he felt no fear. Suddenly he sprang to her side, and threw an arm around her form—her passive but round and palpable form—exclaiming as he did so—

“Mariette—my own Mariette, is it thou? By what miracle did the mercy of God enable thee to escape me? Speak—speak—convince me that it is thee, and to-morrow I will die happy; for I will be guiltless of thy death, Mariette—thine—thine! Oh, that moment of crime, of vengeance, of madness, how dear **it** has cost me! Speak to me, adorable Mariette—thou livest?”

“I do, dearest Bolton, by the mercy of Heaven.”

"True, true!" he gasped; "for thy lover had none." He groaned aloud, and regarded her with eyes full of grief, astonishment, and passion.

"I found myself, when day was breaking, lying near the ruins of the king's house. I had been insensible, I know not how long, and was covered with bruises, and almost dying; for" (she shuddered, and added with a sad but tender smile) "thou, dear heart! in the blindness of thy fury, did so nearly destroy me—"

"Oh, now! when standing upon the verge of my grave, Mariette, remind me not of that moment of dread and despair. Thou wert found—"

"By an aged man, in other days a prebend of St. Giles, Father Tarbet, who conveyed me to a cottage near the ruined convent of Placentia, where an old woman, that in a better time had been a sister of St. Katherine, dwelt; and to her care he bequeathed me. A raging fever preyed upon me long; but, by the goodness of Heaven, and the tenderness of the poor old recluse, I recovered; and, disguised in this long cloak, by presenting to the javellour of Holyrood a forged order purporting to be from the Regent Moray, have gained admittance to thy cell, and am come to save thee, John of Bolton, and to take thy place till to-morrow—to be freed as a woman, or to die in thy name, as fate may direct."

Hepburn wept with rapture to find that he had not destroyed her in that fit of insanity which jealousy and passion had brought upon him; hot and salt were the tears that fell upon her hands, as he kissed them again and again.

"The darkness increases apace," said Mariette; "take thou this mantle and broad hat, lower thy stature, stoop if thou canst, pass forth, and may God attend thee! Leave me in thy place—they cannot have the heart to destroy me, a poor French girl; and yet," she added, in an under tone, "what matters it *now?*"

"Destroy thee? thou the sister of French Paris—of that Nicholas Hubert, who this day died amid the yells of the infuriated thousands who crowded the Lawnmarket like a living sea!"

"True, true, I am his sister!" said Mariette, wringing her hands; "God saine and assoilzie thee, my dear, dear brother; but in this, my disguise of page, I have another chance of escaping, for Charles la Fram Duval, and Dionese la Brone, who, thou

mayest remember, were in thy band of archers, and now serve as arquebusiers in the guard of the Regent Moray, are at this moment sentinels in the Abbey Close, and by their connivance, for the love of old France, I am sure—oh, quite sure—of escaping in safety. Be persuaded, dearest monsieur, I am as certain of freedom as thou art of a terrible death.”

“And by the ignominious rope—the badge of shame—amid a gazing and reviling multitude. John Hepburn, of the house of Bolton—the last of a line whose pennons waved at Halidon—to die thus! God of mercy! any risk were better than the agony of such an end.”

“Away, then, and long ere the sun rises we shall both be free.”

“At this hour, then, to-morrow eve, thou wilt meet me, Mariette.”

“Meet thee—meet thee!—where?”

“At the Rood Chapel, by the loan side that leads to Leith.”

“Ah, monsieur! ’tis a wild and solitary place.”

“But a safe one. Thou knowest it then—near the Gallow-lee. I have much—oh, very much—to say to thee, and many a question to ask. Promise thou wilt come, Mariette, for the sake of that dear love thou didst once bear me!”

“Once,” she repeated mournfully; “well, be it so. I promise—at this hour, then; but away while all around is so quiet and still—take this pass, and leave me to my own ingenuity for rest.”

Bolton wrapped himself in the mantle, and drew the broad Spanish hat over his face.

“Ah, *mon Dieu!* La Fram and Duval will never be deceived!” said Mariette, with anguish, as she surveyed his towering figure.

“Trust to me and the gloom of this autumnal night. To-morrow, then—at the Rood Chapel—remember!” said Hepburn, taking her hands in his, and pausing irresolutely, until impelled by that old regard which, when once kindled in the human heart, can never wholly die, he drew her towards him, and kissed her; but with more calm tenderness, and with less passion, than ever he had done in other days.

“Go, go!” said Mariette, in a choking voice, “I deserve not this honour from thee. Guilty have I been, and false; but St.

Mary be my witness that I speak the truth—I was besieged, betrayed, and dazzled by the artful king ; the rest was fear, despair, and frenzy all !”

She pressed her hands upon her bosom, as if it was about to burst.

“I can conceive all that *now*, Mariette,” replied Hepburn, in the same broken voice, while he pressed her to his heart ; “from my soul I forgive thee, as thou hast done me, the greater, the more awful ill, I meditated against thee.”

They separated ; but he had lingered so long, and time had fled so fast, that midnight tolled from the spire of the old abbey church before he had shown the pass bearing the forged signature of *James Regent*, to the drowsy javellour, or gateward, avoided the sentinels at the outer porch, and issued into the palace gardens, from which, by scaling a wall, he easily made his way to the bare and desolate Calton.

At the east end of the hill there then lay many deep pits, overgrown with whin and bushes ; deep, dangerous, and half-filled with water, the haunt of the hare and fuimart. These were known as the Quarry Holes, and were often the scene of a ducking for sorcery, and legal drowning for various crimes ; and to these he fled for shelter and concealment ; for though hundreds would gladly have afforded him both on his own barony of Bolton, which was only eighteen miles distant, and had been gifted to the (as yet unsuspected) secretary Maitland—there was not a man in Edinburgh but would instantly have surrendered him into the hands of the civil authorities—and to that punishment awarded him as Bothwell’s abettor in the death of the Lord Darnley.

There, overcome by long deprivation of sleep, and the bitterness of his thoughts for many a weary night and day, a deep slumber fell upon him, and the noonday sun of the morrow had soared into the wide blue vault of heaven, ere he awoke to consciousness and a remembrance of where he was—the fate from which he had escaped—the existence and the last devotion of **Mariette**.

Her existence ! While lying in that desolate spot, he knew not what had been acted in the city that lay below the brow of the hill where he lurked in security.

In the grey twilight of that autumnal morning, which a dense and murky mist from the German sea rendered yet more gloomy

the prisoner in the tower of Holyrood had been led forth by the half-intoxicated doomster to die; and passing in her male disguise for Hepburn of Bolton, the repentant Mariette—as an atonement for the falsehood she had practised towards him—a faithlessness that had hurried him into crimes against his country, and plans of vengeance on his king—died on the scaffold, where her brother had perished but the day before—died with the secret of her sex on her lips—and died happy, that in doing so she might, by allaying all suspicion and pursuit, enable her lover to escape.

Young Hepburn knew not of this; but anxiously watched the passing day, and longed for evening, when he was to meet her at the Rood Chapel, a lonely little oratory situated on the open muirland midway between the Calton Hill and St. Anthony's Porte, the southern gate of Leith.

He heard the hum of Edinburgh ascending the hill-side, and the notes of its clocks on the passing wind as they struck the slow-seceding hours. The blue sky was above, and the dark-green whins were nodding from the rocks around him; at times, a red fox put forth its sharp nose and glancing eyes from its secret hole, or a fuimart, with its long body and bushy tail, shot past like an evil spirit; but nothing else disturbed the solitude of the place where he lay. Slowly the weary day rolled on, and he hailed with joy the last red rays of the sun, as they stole up the steep rocks of Salisbury, lingered for a moment on Arthur's rifted cone, and then died away.

The twilight soon came on; the young man crept from his hiding-place, and with an anxious heart descended the northern side of the hill, towards the place of meeting. The last flush of the set sun was lingering still behind the darkening Ochils; and amidst the smoke of busy Leith, the old spire of St. Mary, and St. Anthony's shattered tower were still visible, but a favourable gloom and obscurity were veiling everything; and Bolton hurried with a beating heart to the old oratory, burning to give Mariette the warm embrace her devotion to him in his worst extremity so well deserved.

There was no one there.

Dismantled of its ornaments and statues, its font and altar, its door and windows, by reformers and thieves, the old chapel of the Holy Rood was desolate and empty. The stone arches still sustained the groined roof; but the velvet moss and the

tufted grass grew in the joints of the masonry, and clung to the carved crockets and grotesque corbels.

Long he waited, and anxiously he watched the loan, that, from the chasm below the Calton's western brow, led to Leith; but no one approached—not a footstep or a sound met his ear—but the wind, as it swept over the Gallowlee, whistling drearily in the open tracery of the chapel windows, and waving the tufts of grass and wallflower that grew in its mouldering niches.

Hour succeeded hour.

Midnight came, and an agony entered his soul, for he then feared, he knew not what—he dared not to think of it, but began hastily to traverse the rough horse-way that led to the city.

Near the chapel there stood a clump of ancient sycamores, and among them were two from which the branches had been lopped, and across the tops of these divested trunks, a beam was extended to serve for the gibbet, which obtained for the place the name it bears even unto this day—the Gallowlee—and thereon were usually exposed in chains the bodies of those who had been executed—a barbarous practice, which was common in England until a comparatively recent period.

A crowd of horrible thoughts filled the mind of Bolton; but, above all, two were most palpable before him—the image of Mariette as she had been when he loved her of old, and the gibbet.

He drew near it fearfully.

Behind this ill-omened spot, the landscape to the eastward was level, extending to the seashore; here and there low clumps of coppice and the rocks of Restalrig broke its horizontal outline. The sky was all of a cloudless white tint; there were no stars, there was no moon; but against that cold pale background, the trees and the beam of the gallows stood forth in strong relief and black outline.

On the right towered up the rocky Calton, a dark and undistinguishable mass.

A number of full-fed gleds and monstrous ravens, who built their nests in the sycamores, were perched on the beam of the gallows, where they clapped their dusky wings, and cawed and screamed as the disturber of their feast approached.

Two skeletons were swinging there in the night wind; and the remains of two other beings, evidently fresh from the hands

of the doomster, swung beside them. One was headless and handleless; but, by its bulk and vast conformation, Hepburn knew the body to be that of Black Hob of Ormiston.

The other, which was of much shorter stature and slighter make, hung by the neck vibrating in the passing wind, which swayed it round and waved its long dark hair.

Fearfully, tremblingly, and scarcely daring to breathe, Hepburn of Bolton drew near it.

One glance sufficed him, and he rushed from the spot to return no more.

CHAPTER LXXII.

MALMO.

HERE, for a page or so, we resume the MSS. of the reverend and worthy Magister Absalom Beyer.

About this period his diary, journal, or history, (which you will), for it partakes of them all, suddenly breaks off, and there are left but a few fragments, referring to a later period.

One records the baptism of the sixth son of Anna and Konrad, whom King Frederick, for his valour in capturing a Lubeck frigate that ravaged the shores of Bergen, had created Count of Saltzberg, Lord of Welsoo, and governor of Bergenhus; and the garrulous Magister records that this baptismal ceremony, at which he officiated, and which was celebrated with great splendour, was the seventh anniversary of that joyous day on which he had blessed the nuptial ring of Anna and Konrad in the old cathedral of the bishopric of Bergen; and he further records the quantity of ale, wine, and dricka imbibed on the occasion, and the loads of venison, bread, and bergenvisch, eaten by the tenantry at the baptism of young Hans (for so baby the sixth was named); and how he screamed and kicked when the holy water fell on him, till he nearly sprang from his carved cradle, which was hollowed like a boat in the Norse fashion, lined with moss and velvet, and was borne by Christina Slingebunder, who had found her way from Westeraay back to Bergen.

He also mentions that Konrad had grown somewhat florid, and rather more round in form, than when he had placed the ring on Anna's hand before that magnificent altar; and that

she too, though retaining her youthful bloom, had (alas, for romance!) lost much of her slender and graceful aspect, and looked quite like the mother of the five chubby little ones, each of whom clung to her skirts with one hand, while the other was occupied with a great piece of the spiced christening cake, on which they were regaling with a satisfaction, equalled only by that of the Danish soldier, who, having again found the can and the cake offered on this occasion to Nippen, had appropriated them both to himself.

* * * * *

Ten years have elapsed since the reader last heard in these pages of Bothwell's hapless Earl, and the lonely towers of Malmö.

Ten years!

And in all that long and weary time he had been a fettered felon within the iron walls of Malmö. Pining hopelessly in a captivity the most crushing to a heart so fierce and proud—to a soul so high-spirited and restless, with one thought ever before him—liberty and home; and though forgotten by Mary, or remembered only with a shudder, his old love for *her* had never died; and many a futile effort he made, by piteous letters and petitions, to Frederick II. of Denmark—petitions so humble, that his once proud nature would have shrunk from their tenor—to interest himself, “pour la delivrance de la Royne sa Princesse Marie.”*

But neither her deliverance nor his own were ever achieved; for, were such a thing possible, even God seemed to have abandoned them to a fate that was alike inexorable and irresistible.

Year after year wore away, and the seasons succeeded each other in dreary and monotonous succession. This monotony was most intolerable in winter—the long and desolate winter of the north; when the descending avalanche roared between the frozen peaks—when the ice cracked and burst in the narrow fiords, where the seals and walruscs slept in the rays of the moon—and when the northern lights, as they flashed behind the summits of the distant hills, filled the midnight sky with figures that were equally beautiful and terrible.

Ever and anon, in one of those dreary winters, when (as in A.D. 1333) all the harbours of the Sound were sheeted over with

* See Les Affaires de la Conte du Boduel.

ice, and the shallow Baltic was frozen from Lubeck to the castle of Kiøbenhavn, Bothwell sighed, as he thought of the great Yule-logs that blazed so merrily in many a Scottish hall, of the nut-brown ale and wine that flowed in many a quaigh and luggie; while the green holly branch and the misletoe bough hung from the old roof-trees, and the mirth and joy of the season expanded every heart.

Then came the short spring, that lasted but a month, when the snow melted or lingered only on the distant peaks; when the streams burst their frosty barriers, and, with the roar of a thousand waterfalls, poured in silver currents over the rocks of the fiord, where the wild rasp, the dwarf birch, and the barberry, sprouted in the warmth of the coming sun.

And then, in the early mornings and the late nights of that northern region—nights when the sun sets at twelve P.M., he would gaze, dreamily, from his prison window on the waters of the Sound, until, to his fancy, they became like those of the Clyde, that swept round Bothwell bank, amid its dark green woods and sylvan solitude.

The summer passed, and winter would come again to spread snow and desolation over the face of the land; and so the time wore on, until its very monotony turned his impetuous brain, and he became a raving maniac!

* * * * *

It was in the year of grace 1577, when a Scottish priest, one of those whom the Reformation had compelled to wander, in misery and penury, far from their native lands, appeared at the gates of Malmö, and sought permission of Beirn Gowes, knight castellan, to visit the unhappy captive.

The priest was a man about five-and-thirty; but the duties of his office, toil, and hardship, made him seem considerably older; his head was already becoming bald, even where he had no tonsure; his blue eyes were mild, and deep, and thoughtful; he leaned a little on a staff, and bore on his back the wallet containing a few of the necessaries required by him on his solitary pilgrimage; for he was one of those whose life had been devoted to spreading and upholding the Catholic faith in those northern lauds, where it had been most severely shaken; and, amid hardship and danger, his days were spent in exhorting the faithful, recovering the faithless, and confirming the wavering.

He stood within the vault where Bothwell lay, and, folding

his hands upon his breast, regarded him fixedly with eyes that filled with tears.

Oh, what a change was there !

Visible only in the twilight that struggled through the open grating of that vaulted dungeon, the captive lay in a corner upon a little damp straw, chained by the middle to the wall like a wild animal; he was completely nude, and his coal-black hair and beard, now beginning to be grizzled, flourished in one thick matted and luxuriant mass, from amid which his wild black eyes gleamed like two bright stars. They were hollow, dilated, and ghastly. His form was attenuated to the last degree; every rib, joint, and muscle being horribly visible; he resembled an inmate of the grave—a chained fiend—anything but a man in the prime of life, for the miserable being had barely reached his fortieth year.

When he moved, the straw rustled, and the rusty chain that fretted his tender skin rattled grimly in the ears of the priest, who knelt down in the further end of the dungeon, and prayed with fervour; but Bothwell neither saw nor heard him.

One of those glimmerings of the past that so frequently haunted him, was at that moment coming like a vision before his mind. Exhausted by illness, and the fever of his spirit, the poor maniac had become calm; and his thoughts were slowly emerging from the mist that obscured them, and arranging themselves in order and form, as he struggled back into a consciousness of existence—the brief consciousness that so often precedes the oblivion of the grave.

In the figures made by the damp on his dungeon wall, he saw the same pale face, with its weeping eyes and white veil, that had haunted him so often, ere his overcharged mind found a relief in insanity. Mary—*la Reine Blanche!* he stretched his bony arms towards the figure; but still it remained there, neither advancing nor retiring, till a change came over its features.

Then its eyes seemed to fill with a terrible glare, and the shriek that once rang through the Kirk-of-Field, seemed to rend the massive vault, and to pierce his tingling ears like a poniard. Then he dashed his hands against them, and grovelled down among the straw, to shut out that dreadful sound—the dying cry of Darnley!

“Oh, Father of mercy and of justice!” said the priest,

beating himself upon the breast; "how dreadful is thy vengeance, when thou permittest the sinner to mete out the meed of his own sin!"

"A voice! a voice—who spoke?" said the Earl, struck by the unusual sound. "Hah! was it thee?"

His tone was low and husky, and the sounds seemed to come with labour from his furry throat.

"Was it thee—oh, say it was thee!" he continued, as he paused, and seemed to wrestle mentally with his madness, till he overcame it, and, by obtaining one further revelation of the past, became more and more cognizant of the present, and alive to the real horrors of his situation. "Memory," said he, passing a hand thoughtfully over his brow—"Oh, memory! what a curse art thou; and, when united to remorse, how doubly so! Hah! those eyes," he groaned; "those weeping eyes again!"

But that voice—it was hers! so soft—so gentle! it came back to me like a strain of old music on the wind of memory—as it has often come in the slow hours of many a cheerless day, and the dead calm silence of many a changeless night—through the long dark vista of many monotonous years. Years—how many! oh, how many! Dost thou smile with thine unearthly features? ha! ha!"

Like sunshine emerging from a mist, the past was coming gradually back; and suddenly, like a flash of light, one bright gleam of thought brought all the long-forgotten days of other years before him.

The visionary saw her—Mary—the bright, the beautiful, the innocent, as she had shone in the buoyancy of youth and loveliness, when surrounded by the chivalry of France, and the splendour of the house of Bourbon.

The scene changed—she was standing timidly, irresolute, and pale, on the shores of her half-barbarised native land; again she appeared—it was with the diadem of the Bruce on her brow, and the orb of the Alexanders on her sceptre, as she presided over the first of her factious parliaments, in the ancient hall of the Scottish estates. He saw her standing with the triumphant Darnley at the altar of Sancte Crucis, with more in her air and eye of the timid bride than the stately Queen, blushing and abashed by the side of her handsome and exulting vassal.

Then came the memory of that terrible hour in the Kirk-of-Field—the night in the towers of Dunbar, and that fruitless cry

for merey—the sad low wail that chilled the ruffian heart of Ormiston.

He saw to what he had reduced that bright and happy being, who, like a butterfly or an Indian bird, was born alone for the sunshine and the most flowery paths of life! He saw her robbed of her purity and sweetness—crushed like a rose beneath the coil of a snake; and fancy painted her in a prison like his own, sad, solitary, and desolate—broken in heart, and crushed in spirit—blighted in name and fame and honour—withered in hope and faded in form—a household word of scorn to the cruel and the factious, and all by him—by *him*, who had loved her so madly and so wickedly.

These thoughts poured like a current through the floodgate of memory; each and all came back with returning consciousness; and gradually his career arose before him, like one stupendous curse.

He sighed heavily.

“God be with thee, thou sinful and vain-glorious—thou rash and headstrong—lord!” said the priest; “now thou seest to what thy manifold transgressions against the blessed law have brought thee.”

“It was my doom—my destiny,” replied the Earl, pressing his bony hands upon his thin, wan temples.

“Nay, Lord Earl,” replied the other, in a sad and broken accent; “unless it be that a man maketh his own destiny, as assuredly thou didst thine.”

“And who,” he asked, endeavouring to pierce the gloom with his hopeless eye; “who art thou that speakest thus to Bothwell?”

“One, in other days, Lord Bothwell’s steadfast friend. I am John Hepburn of Bolton—hast thou quite forgotten me? I was long the partner of thy folly—the abettor of thine insane ambition—the partaker of thy damning guilt! *O miserere mei Deus!*”

“Oh, Bolton! John of Bolton!” exclaimed the fettered Earl, bursting into tears, and stretching forth his thin worn hands, which the priest grasped with fervour; “I know thee now—and where I am, and *what* I am. And thou art now a priest? Oh, how much thou art to be envied! Years—years have gone past me as the wind passes over the ocean. As the waves arise and sink, these years have come and gone, and have left no trace on

my memory. But I feel that I am dying now!" he exclaimed in an unearthly voice; "Oh, God of my fathers! look down with pity on me, the most abject of their race! Oh, John of Bolton! if Heaven should be as unforgiving as earth—if God should be as inexorable as man!"

"Think not so, Bothwell—"

"Oh! it were indeed better that I should perish altogether, and pass into oblivion."

"Say not so," replied Bolton; "behold the flowers of the field, and the fruits of the earth; they spring up—they bloom—they wither, and die; but only to be reproduced at another season, more beautiful and blooming than before. So it is with men—and so will it be with thee. All human memory is freighted with care and sad remembrance"—

"But few with such remorse as mine."

"This contrition and grief are good," replied the priest, as, with kindling eyes, he pointed upwards to Heaven; "by perishing thou shalt be preserved, and die but to be renewed for ever, and in such glory as the mind of angels can alone conceive; for He who is above us, beareth aloft those scales, from which, on one hand, he metes out eternal life to the good and contrite—on the other, the eternal punishment to the unrepentant."

"Thou hast been lately in Scotland," said the Earl abruptly.

"Nay; not for ten long years," replied the priest calmly.

"Ten, ten!" reiterated Bothwell, passing his hands across his brow; "and what of Mary?"

"She is still a captive, with the axe of the English queen hanging over her devoted head."

Bothwell started, as if he would have leaped from the ground; but his strength failed him, and he sank heavily on the straw among which he was chained.

"My energies, so briefly gained, are sinking fast again; but ere they leave me, and perhaps for ever—oh! thou who art a priest, bless me, for I have sinned! Hear my confession—let it be written out, and attested by the captain of my prison, that my last earthly act may be one of justice to her whom I have so deeply wronged. Oh, John of Bolton! thou knowest well that *she* was the most innocent and artless of all God's creatures. Quick, quick! as an atonement to her, and to the world, for all I have done—hasten, ere it be too late!" cried the Earl sinking back, overcome by weakness and despair.

The friar knocked hurriedly on the dungeon door; it was opened by a Danish pikeman, who, by his request, hastened to summon the attendance of Biern Goves, the castellan of Malmö and governor of Draxholm. Unwillingly he came, accompanied by Christian Alborg, Otto Brawe, captain of the king's castle of Ottenbrocht, Baron Gullemsticrne, and others, with whom he had been drinking skiedam, till their faces, where visible through their red Danish beards and outrageous whiskers, were flushed like scarlet—and in their presence, that document, now so well known, the CONFESSIOn of Bothwell's many crimes, and Mary's innocence of all that she had ever been accused of, was written, attested, and sealed up for transmission to King Frederick.

What a subject for a picture would this episode have formed!

That dreary vault of red granite, half-veiled in dusky obscurity, save where the moonlight struggled through a narrow slit on one hand; while, on the other, the flickering light of a single torch shed its fitful glare on the unearthly form of the dying Earl—hollow-eyed, pale, and attenuated to a skeleton—chained by the waist to his bed of straw, and sinking fast, with the death rattle almost in his throat; the bald head and dark robe of the priest, who knelt by his side writing down his dying words—that priest in other days his friend and knightly comrade—on the tall, burly figures of the sleepy Danish governor and his friends, with their long beards, and fantastic costumes trimmed with sable fur, stooping over the sputtering torch, to hear the faint but terrible words of those pale lips that were about to close for ever.

"Now, blessed be God, it is done!" cried the Earl, closing his eyes; "for I feel that I am passing from among you. I am dying! Oh, John of Bolton! in this dread moment let me think that thou at least will stand by my grave—will say one prayer for my soul; and, in memory of the days of other years, will remember me with pity and forgiveness!"

Bolton pressed his clammy hand, but there was no return, for the jaw relaxed, and the eyes turned back within their sockets, announced that the soul of the Earl had fled.

* * * * *

His grave lay under the old castle wall, in a lonely little dell.

It was shaded by the light leaves of the dwarf-birch and the purple flowers of the lilac-tree; the blue forget-me-not, the white strawberry, and the yellow-daisy, were planted there by

the kind-hearted Swedes, in memory of the poor stranger that had found a grave so far from his home, and from where the dust of his forefathers lay.

On St. Bothan's eve, for many a returning year, a wandering priest was seen to kneel beside that lonely grave, with eyes downcast, and a crucifix in his clasped hands; and after praying he would go sadly away, but whither no one knew.

Year after year passed on, and still he came to offer up that promised prayer for the repose of the dead man's soul; though on the grave the weeds grew long and rank, and he who lay within it had long since mingled with the dust.

Those who first remembered the priest when they were little children, saw him still returning when they were men and women in the prime of life—but then he was decrepit and old.

The last time he was seen was in the reign of King Christian IV., about the year 1622. His form was then bent with extreme old age, and he leaned upon a staff; his hair was thin and white, his cheeks were hollow, and he wept as he prayed.

He gazed long and wistfully at the grassy tomb, and tottered away to return no more.

Where that poor priest died, no man knew.

And there lay the deserted grave in its loneliness, by the shore of the northern sea, with the long grass waving on its solemn ridge, till in time it became flattened and effaced, and its memory was forgotten; for no kind hand ever raised a stone to mark where that memorable instance of ambition and misrule, the last Earl of the old line of Hailes and Bothwell, lay.

THE END.

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